OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

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ULTIMATE GUIDE SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

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THE MAKING OF KARATEKA

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GUITAR HERO

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THE VIDEATORS TAKE US BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE POPULAR TV SHOW

POOL OF RADIANCE

DISCOVER HOW SSI'S PIONEERING D&D GAME SCORED A CRITICAL HIT

ALSO INSIDE

BATTLETOADS
SPY HUNTER
DARKWING DUCK
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY OF THE MONKEY ISLAND SERIES?

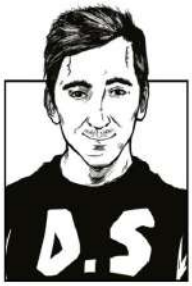
DARRAN JONES

For me, it has to be meeting Ron Gilbert when he visited our Bournemouth office to promote *Thimbleweed Park* for *games™*. I just managed to catch him as he was leaving to say how much I loved his games.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, one SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing:
Magic: The Gathering Arena

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



DREW SLEEP

I remember having a copy of *LeChuck's Revenge* with a Mix 'N' Mojo wheel and using it to unlock the game. It was the first time I encountered any copy protection with videogames and it added this extra bit of pizazz to an amazing adventure.

Expertise:
"Do a kickflip!"

Currently playing:
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII

NICK THORPE

Shamefully, *Monkey Island* is one of the gaps in my retro knowledge as I was a console kid in the series' heyday. I always liked the concept of insult sword fights, though.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing:
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

ANDY SALTER

"Is that a banana in your pocket or are you just glad to see us?"

Expertise:
Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing:
Mount And Blade II: Bannerlord

Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War

DAVID CROOKES

The insult sword fighting will always stick in the mind because I just love silly, creative spins on age-old concepts.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

PAUL DRURY

I only got to play the first *Monkey Island* many years after its original release, so it's not so much memories as smiling at the verbal jousting bits. Ahead of their time, those boys.

Expertise:
Taxi Driver quotes

Currently playing:
Skramble!

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

IAIN LEE

I've never played *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, I'm afraid.

Expertise:
Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it

Currently playing:
Home Sweet Home

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)

HARETH AL BUSTANI

It has to be the ending of *Monkey Island 2*. Possibly the most unexpected, surreal and brilliant ending of all time. Lord knows what Ron Gilbert had in mind next!

Expertise:
Juggling obscure games, words and guitar and seeing where it lands

Currently playing:
The Curse Of Monkey Island

Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island

PAUL ROSE

I never played *Monkey Island*! Yet somehow I seem to know all the jokes...

Expertise:
Winging it

Currently playing:
Marvel's Avengers

Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

LOADING...

Along with a large number of *D&D* adventures, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was one of the games that convinced me that I needed to own an Amiga. I'd abandoned home computers as soon as I got my hands on a Master System and the 16-bit consoles were definitely my jam, but the SNES didn't have Guybrush Threepwood's debut adventure and I really wanted to play it. While plenty of console games had made me laugh over the years, I'd never experienced a game that was as riotously silly as *Monkey Island* was. Even the game's security measures promised that your stay on Mêlée Island would be a fun one, and boy it did not disappoint.

It's been a real pleasure, then, to assemble the core team of designers and writers that helped make *Monkey Island* such a success, and we've done our very best to break the game down into the key components that made it so much fun, from the insult-based sword fighting to the gorgeous looking locations that Guybrush would visit.

If *Monkey Island* isn't your particular jam, there's plenty more great games to discover, from the creation of the rhythm action mega-hit *Guitar Hero*, to the first *Dungeons & Dragons* game actually based on the *D&D* ruleset. We've also rounded up a selection of amazing C64 games to seek out and battled Videators from the anarchic TV show, *Games World*, as well as much more.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine!

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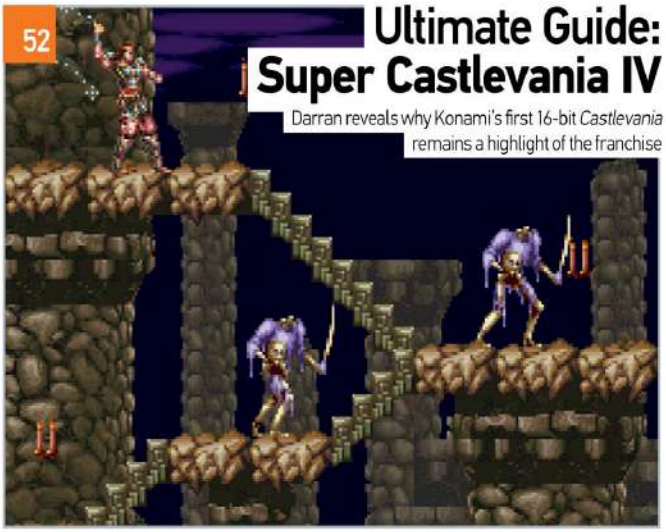

Ultimate Guide: Super Castlevania IV
Darran reveals why Konami's first 16-bit *Castlevania* remains a highlight of the franchise

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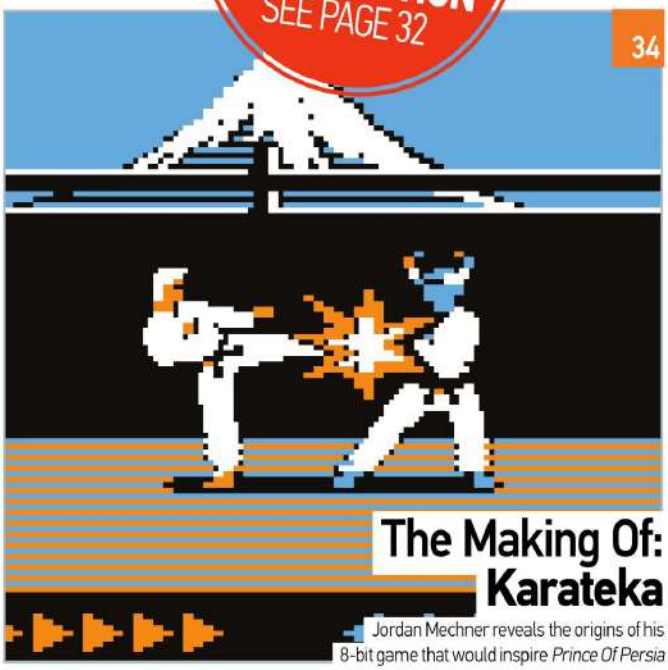

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> "When the very first units started to get delivered, we were hit with a stream of unboxing pictures and testimonials that surpassed our wildest hopes"
> Henrique Olifiers

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM?

Henrique Olifiers on Kickstarters past and present

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Nick endangers himself every month to bring you the exciting gaming news of yesteryear

Despite a few teething issues during production, the ZX Spectrum Next was extremely well-received when it eventually arrived earlier this year. In fact, it's proven to be such a hit that when Henrique Olifiers started a second Kickstarter to deliver an enhanced version of the Spectrum Next, it absolutely smashed its £250,000 target goal in under five minutes, and it went on to beat the original final Kickstarter amount of £723,390 in its first 24 hours. The second run has now finished and sits at a staggering £1,847,106, enough to ensure a new episode of *Head Over Heels*, with input from creator Jon Ritman will be made. Needless to say, Henrique couldn't be happier.

Congratulations on smashing your crowdfunding target! Are you pleased with the reception of this second Kickstarter?
It is humbling and amazing to witness such strong support for the project and the future of the Spectrum. The Spectrum Next is about its community, it wouldn't amount to much more than a gadget without its fans. The users are what make it special, and worth getting involved with. Watching the incredible support was the best possible recognition one could expect.

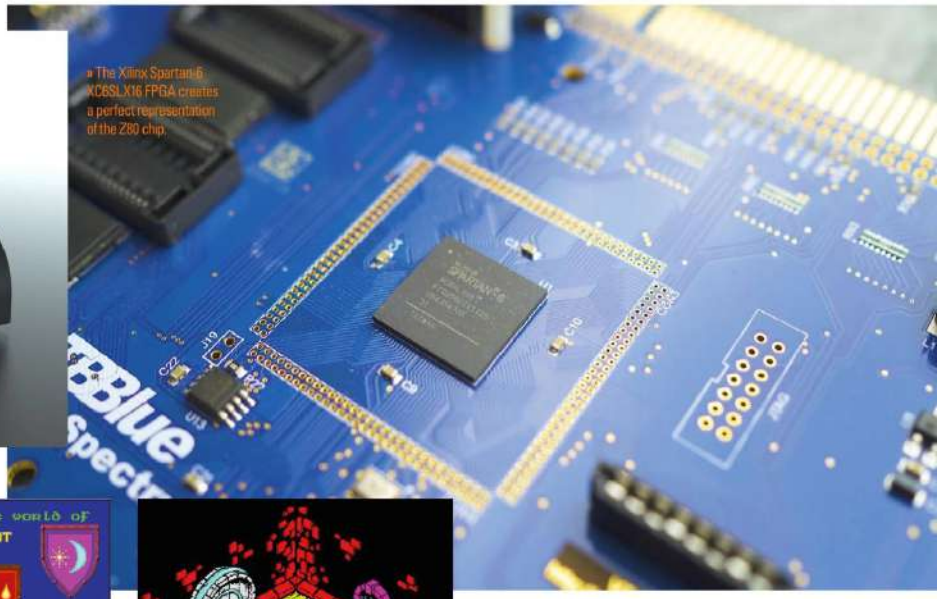
What response have you had from owners of the original Kickstarter?
When the very first units started to get delivered, we were hit with a stream of unboxing pictures and testimonials that surpassed our wildest hopes [...]. There's one quote amongst many that made us particularly emotional – a gentleman who described how he waited for his kids to go to bed, for the house to be silent, so he could unbox his Next and revive the moment he first opened his original ZX Spectrum. It was a touching moment full of appreciation for what we've done, and it paid back all the effort we've put into making the computer a reality.

You were very honest during your first campaign, even when it wasn't good news. Do you feel this helped this second launch?
I truly believe so. Crowdfunding is meant to be about transparency,

» Henrique Olifiers has recently completed a second Kickstarter featuring an enhanced Spectrum Next.

the journey from idea to realisation, for better or worse. It will never be flawless, there will be setbacks – in our case, more than our fair share, resulting in a significant delay to ship the original batch of Spectrum Next systems. But the protracted process was a result of the right reasons: attention to detail, uncompromising quality [and making] a machine worth having. Communicating this was never difficult because it was the truth, we were trying to make it the best computer we could possibly ship, and it resonated with the backers.

» If you're not excited by those coloured stripes you're not a Spectrum fan. Or a **Retro Gamer** fan.



» The Xilinx Spartan-6 XC6SLX16 FPGA creates a perfect representation of the Z80 chip.

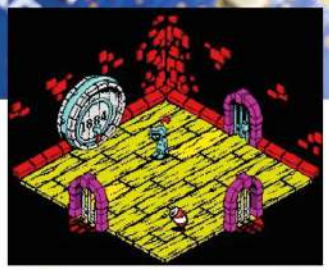
What mistakes did you make with the original Kickstarter and how have you rectified them?
We underestimated a fair amount of production complexities, in particular the keyboard. It was always meant to be updated to today's standards of ergonomics and typing bandwidth, while remaining compatible with the original ZX Spectrum keyboard to every degree. This proved impossible: the original keyboard membrane of the Plus/128 models with the extended keys was made of three layers, and the extra layer made the keys too heavy to press. We spent an inordinate amount of time before we bit the bullet and added a few more contacts in order to ditch the third layer. We should've made this decision earlier instead of trying an endless string of dead ends.

We are still in the process of improving the board further. Some Wi-Fi modules induce noise on the original Spectrum Nexts, so we're moving them away from the video and audio areas in the board. A few TV models do feed power through the HDMI connector, causing the Spectrum Next's RAM to be kept alive when the power supply is turned off. This is also something we're tackling now. But overall, the original Spectrum Next resulted in a very rounded, capable and stable machine, it's now a matter of perfecting something that was already pretty good. Not a bad situation to deal with.

» [Next] Henrique tells us, "If there's anything we can do to help developers, we will do. Most of the features of the Next were direct requests from devs working on early versions of the platform."

» [Next] We are very much looking forward to playing the weird and wonderful *Baggers In Space*.

» [Next] Games like *The Lords Of Midnight* are greatly enhanced over the Spectrum originals.



» [Next] There are plenty of great Next games to still look forward to, including *Meikhior's Mansion*.

How do you see COVID-19 potentially affecting this new wave of machines?
The pandemic caused a lot of disruption to the original project, as we shipped most units right under lockdown. The logistics of countries closing and opening, couriers switching practices, addresses being redirected… it was quite the task. And yet we succeeded. Now COVID-19 might actually help us, as unlikely as it sounds. Demand for certain components fell, thus lead times and availability are likely to improve. There's a silver lining for every situation, I suppose.

How have you selected backer tiers this time?
We went into 'Kickstarter two' with a mindset of simplifying things. The most popular model of the Next was the Accelerated, even though we limited its availability. It became the focus of the attention this time around, with only one other SKU, the Plus, made available, which is essentially an Accelerated model minus the accelerator, which can be easily added later on. We ditched the tiers that required customisation, such as laser etching, for a simple reason: when one of these is lost in transit, they are literally irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind items. Thus we focused on what people really want: a ZX Spectrum Next.

Why is it so important that the Next is easy to code on?
Simple, the community asked for it. For instance, the Next's Z80 has more than 80 new instructions compared to the original ZX Spectrum's Z80. These are all geared towards simplifying its use, or making the processor more powerful. In the end, both result in a better, easier experience for anyone coding.

Would you like to see it in education like the BBC Micro was?
That would be a wonderful development… the Next certainly has this potential of getting kids in touch with a machine that features an exposed core, where you can mess around with any aspect of it without fear of damage or corruption of, say, its OS. Maybe that's in its future. We certainly haven't pursued it yet… food for thought. ✱

INCOMING GAMES

Next titles you should be playing soon

WONDERFUL DIZZY

News has been a little quiet lately but a recent blog post suggests that the new *Dizzy* game should be available by the end of the year. All the music and graphics are now finished and the actual project has been overseen by *Dizzy*'s original creators, the Oliver twins. Dig deeper at spectrumnextgames.uk.

SPECTRON: 2084

A cracking version of Eugene Jarvis' game was coded for the Spectrum and reviewed but never released. Hopefully this exciting new update by Robin Verhagen-Guest will have a better fate. It certainly looks the part, but we're keen to see how the twin-stick setup will be replicated on the Next.

FOREIGN CABINET

We were huge fans of *Split Personalities* back in the day so it's great to see that Lampros Potamianos is working on a new version of the fun sliding-puzzle game for the Next. Soon you can have fun rebuilding numerous politicians, or you can simply leave them in pieces…

» We understand the desire to make these things collectable, but 2,000 copies is simply too few. Come on, guys!

TURBO TIME TUNNEL

The *Battletoads* revival movement is still going strong, as iam8bit is currently taking preorders for the *Battletoads: Smash Hits* double LP. The first disc contains music from the original NES game by David Wise, while the second contains David Housden's soundtrack for this year's series reboot. The package is expected to ship in Q4 2020, and is priced at $42.99. The company is also bringing Zitz, Rash and Pimple back to the NES in physical form, but the full 2,000 copy production run of the *Battletoads Legacy Cartridge Collection* has already sold out at $99.99 a pop. Good luck hunting for that on eBay!

GUN-AND-FUN

Factor 5 has announced the *Turrican Anthology*, spread across two volumes for PS4 and Switch – each comprised of five games from the Amiga, Mega Drive and SNES. Also, Factor 5 is issuing new Mega Drive and SNES cartridges. *Super Turrican 2* will be reprinted, and *Mega Turrican: The Director's Cut* and *Super Turrican: The Director's Cut* will be available as cartridges for the first time. All of these are available in PAL and NTSC versions for €49.99, with a production run of 1,500 copies for each cartridge. Physical copies are available for preorder at strictlylimitedgames.com.

» Nintendo is celebrating its *Super Mario Bros* birthday in style with a bunch of games and products.

MARIO MADNESS

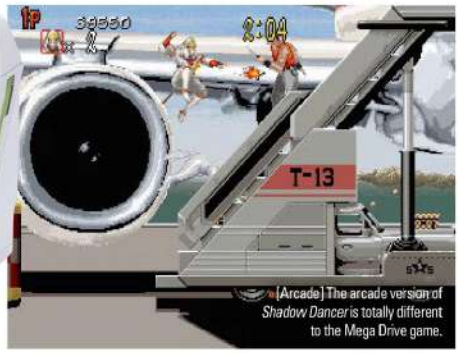
NINTENDO ANNOUNCES A VARIETY OF 35TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECTS

Gaming's most famous character is settling into middle age in style, with a multitude of new releases highlighting the character's history. On the Switch, *Super Mario 3D All-Stars* packages *Super Mario 64*, *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Super Mario Galaxy* into a single compilation, with improved resolution and widescreen support for *Sunshine* and *Galaxy*. Bizarrely, this will be made available in limited quantities physically, and will only be available until the end of March 2021 digitally. On 12 February 2021, *Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury* arrives on Switch, expanding over the 2013 Wii U game with a new section themed around Mario's fire-breathing nemesis.

Elsewhere on the Switch, *Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit* lets you race remote-control cars around your own home using your Switch as a controller. *Super Mario Bros 35* is a limited-time battle royale game available until the end of March 2021, in which players attempt to survive in the original 1985 platformer, while sending enemies to their opponents. Lastly, a full colour Game & Watch featuring the NES versions of *Super Mario Bros* and *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* is scheduled for 13 November 2020.

ASTRO GO GO

SEGA CONFIRMS FINAL GAMES LIST FOR NEW MINI ARCADE MACHINE



[Arcade] The arcade version of *Shadow Dancer* is totally different to the Mega Drive game.

Having already announced the initial ten games for its latest mini system, the Astro City Mini, Sega has since revealed the 26 additional games that complete the Japan-only system's line-up. These include a number of games that are seeing their first arcade-perfect home releases, including the System 32 brawler *Arabian Fight* and the *Shinobi* spin-off *Shadow Dancer*, as well as popular titles like *Space Harrier*, *Puyo Puyo 2* and the *Wonder Boy Trilogy*. An arcade stick peripheral costing the same price as the console itself (¥12,800, roughly £90) was also confirmed. The console will be released 17 December 2020.

» [Arcade] *Arabian Fight* has never had a home release before, increasing the desirability of the Astro City Mini.

- Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars
- Alien Storm
- Alien Syndrome
- Altered Beast
- Arabian Fight
- Bonanza Bros
- Columns
- Columns II
- Cotton
- Crack Down
- Dark Edge
- ESWAT
- Fantasy Zone
- Flicky
- Gain Ground
- Golden Axe
- Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder
- Ichidant-R
- Ninja Princess
- Puyo Puyo
- Puyo Puyo 2
- Puzzle & Action: Tant-R
- Quartet 2
- Rad Mobile
- Scramble Spirits
- Seishun Scandal (My Hero)
- Shadow Dancer
- Shinobi
- Sonic Boom
- Space Harrier
- Stack Columns
- Thunder Force AC
- Virtua Fighter
- Wonder Boy
- Wonder Boy In Monster Land
- Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair

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CEPI represents 92% of European pulp and paper production

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

I wanna hold your hand(held)

I am overwhelmed by choice at the moment. There is too much of everything and I believe I may have caught the dreaded 'FOMO'. The fear of missing out is real, and my god it hurts. I can't sleep at night, I get the sweats and I end up spending money I do not have on stuff I never even touch!

I love a handheld machine. The first one I ever got was *Mini Munchman*, a cute little *Pac-Man* rip-off, back in the day when you could apparently copy anything in the world and release it as your own. Once I had this game in my hands, even though it was dead easy, I could not put it down.

I remember the moment I received it as clear as if it happened last week. It was at my aunt's house, Boxing Day 1982. We always went to my aunt on Boxing Day to get a few lower-rent presents. Normally, the gifts weren't that exciting but this year was different. I ripped off the wrapping and was blown away by this small silver and yellow box. I hadn't asked for this. I didn't even know what this was, but instinctively I opened it up, set the clock (I *always* set the clock first!) and started playing. It was one of a few perfect moments in my childhood. My parents were there and happy, my aunt and uncle were pleased to see me, everything was right with the world.

I became addicted to handhelds, the *Donkey Kong 2* Game & Watch being another favourite, but nothing equaled the buzz of that first day playing a *Pac-Man* clone. Nearly 40 years later, I seem to be having some kind of relapse. So many handhelds are being brought out right now that can play pretty much anything. The Evercade has been discussed within this magazine many times. Then, last week, a friend told me about a machine from China called the RK2020. I looked and yes, it is indeed a mighty beast. I had to have it. As I type this, I am hoping the order arrives this week. But wait, just last night the same 'friend' then tells me about the Retroid Pocket 2 which is supposedly even more powerful than the RK2020 and I should order that and.... STOP!

I know why I'm doing this. And I also know it won't work. I'm trying to recreate that moment back in 1982. That moment when my dad was alive and still married to my mum. When my mum could walk and talk and remember things, before she got a literally crippling case of MS. When my aunt and uncle still spoke to me and hadn't cut me and my sister off completely. When I wasn't worried about making the mortgage next month.

I'm trying to time travel via videogames and, I hate to break it to all of you, it isn't possible. Not completely. I can maybe get the feel back for a few minutes, even smells can return when I'm playing an old game, but actual pure time travel? Sorry. It doesn't work. *

> "I'm trying to time travel via videogames and, I hate to break it to all of you, it isn't possible"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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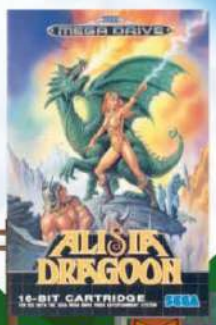

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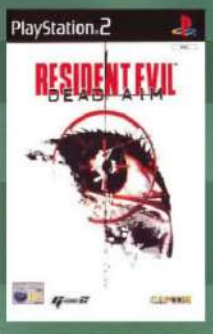

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

It's the simple things...

Is there any such thing as a perfect videogame? Admittedly, it's a question that is always going to be subjective, but I think it's an easier question to answer than it might be for other art forms such as, say, music or movies or, I dunno, wood carving.

As games have become ever more complex, more expensive and more technologically advanced, I'd argue that they invite more room for imperfections to creep in. I mean, how often do we hear about the bugged releases of massive, triple-A games? Frankly, every single time one is released, because we gamers do like to complain.

Modern games tend not to be 'one thing'. Look at a recent *Grand Theft Auto* game, for example – it's not just a shoot-'em-up... it's a driving game, it's a tennis game, it's a flight simulator, it's an RPG, it's a strategy game, it's a billion different things in one. It's a relatively new phenomenon that open-world map-moppers are essentially an anthology of different genres stitched together by a setting and a story.

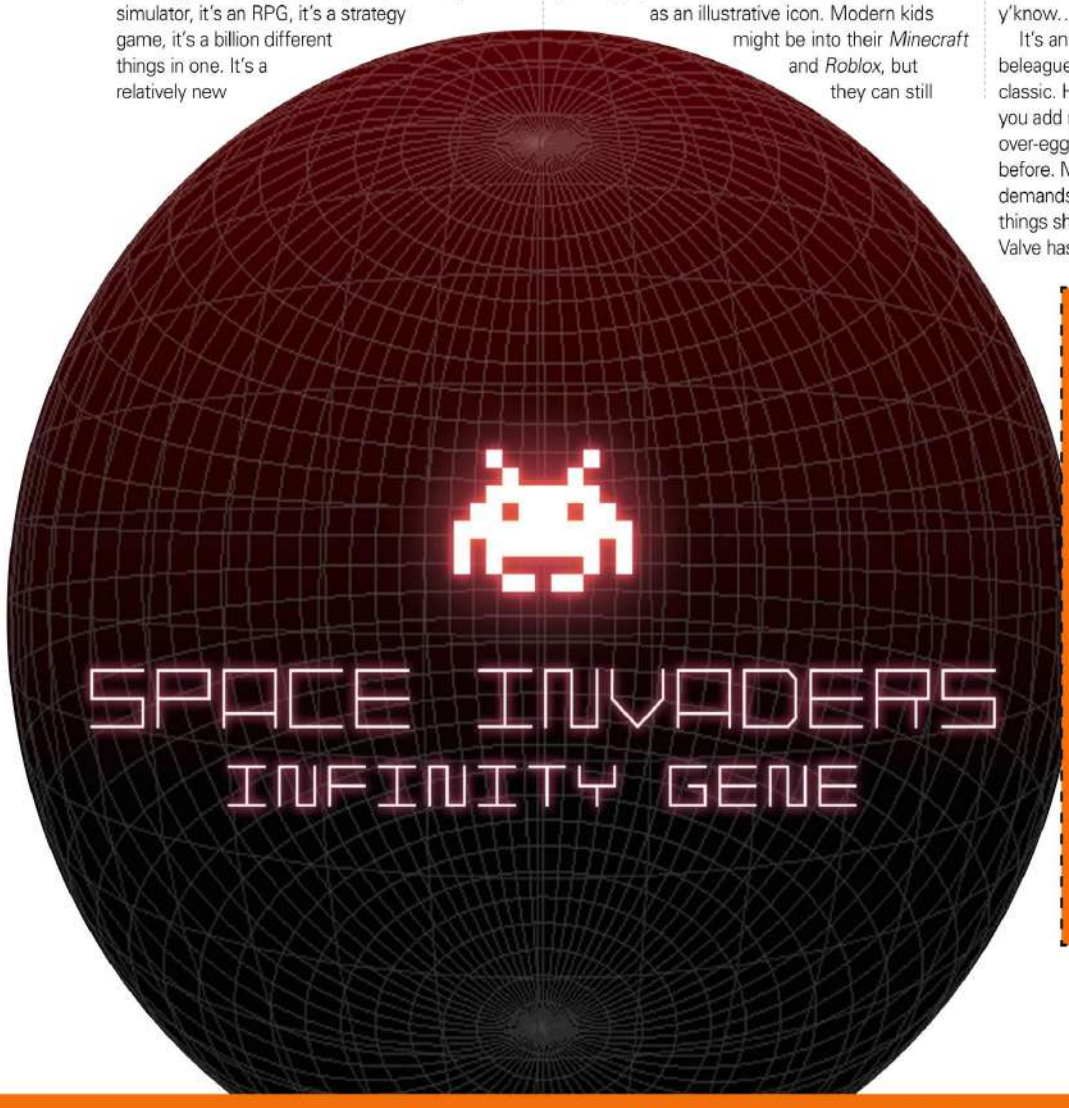
Early arcade games – or, at least, the wave of arcade games most of us consider to be the first generation of blockbusters – were gaming stripped down to its essence. There were no bells or whistles, visuals were iconic in their simplicity, and those early games typically built upon one deceptively simple gameplay mechanic. Even something as seemingly high tech as *Dragon's Lair* was as basic and straightforward as gameplay gets.

Not all of them got it right, of course. For every *Q*Bert* there was an *ET The Extra-Terrestrial*, but there's a reason why those embryonic classics have endured. If you see a news piece about gaming, *Space Invaders* will often still be used as an illustrative icon. Modern kids might be into their *Minecraft* and *Roblox*, but they can still recognise Pac-Man. Mario, even in something as new as *Super Mario Odyssey*, still paid homage to his 2D roots.

It's telling that sequels to *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Tetris* et al have never had the same sort of impact as their originators. Who remembers *Hatris*, or *Tetris 4D*, or *Tetris Worlds*, or *Space Invaders Evolution*, or *Space Invaders Infinity Gene*? Or, rather, who remembers them fondly?

Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures attempted to circumnavigate this issue, despite billing itself as the legitimate sequel to the original, by adopting a completely new genre – a weird sort of point-and-click adventure thing, that is rightly considered to be one of the most abrupt left-turns in gaming history. You didn't even control the eponymous hero, but a disembodied cursor. Still, at least they didn't just replace Pac-Man with, y'know... a hat.

It's an issue that will always plague beleaguered developers tasked with following up a classic. How do you build upon perfection? When you add new ingredients to the recipe, you risk over-egging the pudding, ruining what came before. Market forces dictate that success demands that it be built upon, but sometimes things should just be left alone. There's a reason Valve has never made a proper *Half-Life 3*.



> "There were no bells or whistles, visuals were iconic in their simplicity, and those early games typically built upon one deceptively simple gameplay mechanic"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

UV or not UV? That is the question

Laurence Bennion on jazzing up the Vectrex

» Laurence has now made a large number of different overlays, including some for specific games like *Armor Attack*.

The Vectrex has been having a resurgence in popularity lately, and one of the coolest things we've encountered are Blacklighter's new ultraviolet overlays, which greatly enhance many of the games that are available. Here, creator Laurence Bennion reveals how they came to be.

Where did the idea for your UV overlays originate?

I converted a room in my house into a UV 'man cave' that lit up like an Eighties nightclub. I bought a UV printer to make my own art. My Vectrex was there and I thought I'd give it the *Tron* treatment.

What does the UV lighting and your overlays offer over a traditional Vectrex setup?

The UV complements the vectors as they both glow with a similar intensity. In many cases the overlays can give an impression of depth or create an optical illusion to enhance the experience. Plus it makes an Eighties console even more Eighties!

» The Sniper Lens overlay looks particularly good when combined with *Battlezone*.

» Laurence's desire to create a UV retreat led to his new Vectrex project.

Tell us about the UV Frame...

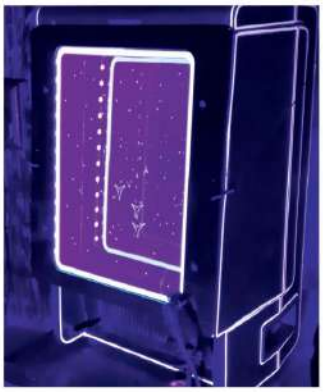
The frame was devised by James Watt from Clockwork Robot. He's the brilliant developer behind major Vectrex homebrew titles like *Stramash Zone* and *NOX*. The frame gives a bright, uniform light around the screen and allows the UV to be used in daylight. It can also be programmed to sync with the gameplay and takes peripherals like the HoloCube which uses a semi-transparent mirror to make the vectors look like they're floating in the air!

What's the difference between the 12V and 5V frames?

The 5V is powered by the Vectrex itself through the second joystick port. The 12V requires its own power supply, but frees up the port for use with a second player or 3D Imager etc. It can also be used with a dimmer wheel to set the perfect UV brightness for each game.

How long does it typically take you to create an overlay?

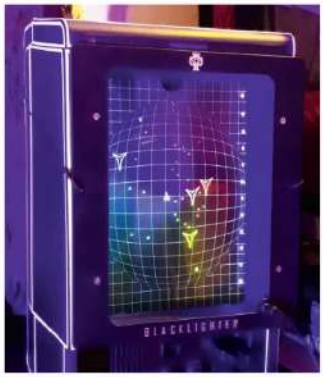
The original grid overlay took no time at all and just happened to line up with the vectors in lots of games which was a complete surprise. A succession of grid-based overlays followed that created different illusions like the 'Sphere' and 'Tunnel'. Then came the recreation of blacklight arcade classics like *Asteroids Deluxe* and *Warrior*, which took a long time to get them accurate and involved the addition on a neon printer to get the vivid purples and pinks. In manufacturing terms, each overlay is printed seven times in a variety of different inks so they're quite laborious.



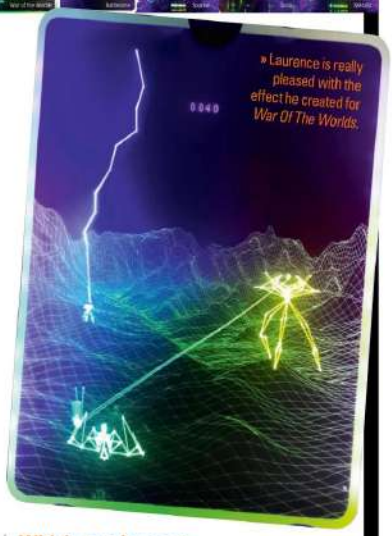
» Combining Laurence's overlays with Clockwork Robot's frame creates some impressive depth when gaming.

Why make overlays that aren't specific to a certain Vectrex game?

Most overlays are just borders and logos, and I wanted to make more universal overlays with graphics that blended with the vectors. Overlays that worked with certain types of games rather than specific games. Recently, I've been experimenting with holographic laminates that work universally and animate as you move your head.



» Many of the overlays are designed to work with different games, but some work better than others.



» Laurence is really pleased with the effect he created for *War Of The Worlds*.

Which overlays are you most proud of?

I'm really fond of my *War Of The Worlds* overlay. The original arcade backdrop was poor and the game seemed dull. The UV version puts the action into a rocky canyon with the aliens being dropped in the distance and climbing over the terrain towards you. Combined with the lightning bolts in the Fury Unlimited homebrew version, it adds real atmosphere.

Why is the Vectrex scene so popular at the moment?

There's been a convergence of many brilliant people from Thomas Sontowski, creator of the VecFever cart that allows you to play the original vector arcade games on the Vectrex, to the great homebrew developers and creators of new peripherals etc. The system has been brought way beyond its original capabilities and the gap between the arcades and the console has narrowed. It might be 39 years old but there are so many resources out there now so more and more people are able to enjoy this amazing system. ✱

You can buy overlays from **blacklighter.co.uk**. The frame is available from **clockworkrobot.com**.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

NOVEMBER 2003 – The hardware manufacturers are sounding the call to arms, but software publishers are sleeping at the wheel with a surprisingly weak pre-Christmas selection. Nick Thorpe sets off in his time machine to seek out the highlights

[PS2] Do the new attitude and new gameplay do *Jak II* any good? The gaming press seems unable to decide.

NEWS NOVEMBER 2003

Guy Fawkes Night might fall on 5 November, but *The Matrix* Revolutions failed to deliver the fireworks expected when it opened in cinemas worldwide. *Empire*'s three-star review complained that "spectacle and pretentiousness follow on from each other in steady succession", and declared both *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* would be "remembered as an indulgence for fans". The film opened strongly but quickly dropped off, as viewers were turned off by mixed reviews and the disappointment of *The Matrix Reloaded*.

President George W Bush made a state visit to the UK from 18 to 20 November, angering those opposed to the US-led war in Iraq, in which the UK was a key US ally. Prime minister Tony Blair defended the invitation, saying that it was "the right moment for us to stand firm with the United States in defeating terrorism". An anti-war protest estimated at 100,000 to 200,000 participants was organised for the final day of the president's visit.

The 2003 Rugby World Cup final took place on 22 November, with a crowd of 82,957 present at the Telstra Stadium. England defeated hosts Australia 20-17 to win the tournament for the first time. The final was dramatic – Australia took the game to extra time in the 80th minute, and both teams scored penalties before England's Johnny Wilkinson scored a drop goal with less than 30 seconds on the clock.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 2003

The pressure was on as the battle for Christmas sales began anew, and console manufacturers tweaked their hardware offerings accordingly. Sony brought the official price of the PS2 down from £169.99 to £139.99, bringing it considerably closer to the price of the Xbox, which Microsoft had cut to £129.99 six months prior. Sony also launched a silver edition of the PS2 for £149.99. Nintendo, already struggling to compete, realised that price parity would do it no good and swiftly cut the GameCube to £79.99. This earned the goodwill of Argos, which decided to carry the console again after clearing its own inventory of the console at the same price earlier in the year. The only problem for Nintendo was that the decision came too late for the console to be included in the catalogue, potentially hurting consumer awareness of the console and its new price.

For PS2 owners, the big game of the month was undoubtedly *Jak II: Renegade*, the sequel to Naughty Dog's popular platformer *Jak & Daxter*. This new entry in the series retained some platform elements, but added plenty of *GTA*-style elements, such as gunplay and vehicles, and some new, darker storytelling to match. *Play*'s Ryan King loved it, assessing it as "not simply a case of bigger and better" as it "plays suitably differently to the original", in a 92% review. Less impressed, *games™* awarded the game 7/10, claiming that the genre blending "just doesn't gel" and that "without lock-on systems or first-person aiming, fighting the good fight can often be trickier than it really should". *Edge* also awarded the game 7/10, praising it as "an awesome achievement, a marvel of programming and an object lesson in being as pleasant as possible to the person playing it", but concluded that it wasn't actually any more fun than its competition.

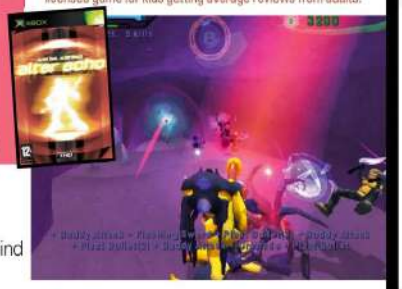
Of course, for every big first-party hope over the holidays, you'll usually find a few big multiplatform licensed games, and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds* was better received than most. While praising the game's graphics, sound and combat, *NGC* occasionally got "so stuck we came dangerously close to turning the 'Cube off in disgust", and awarded it 70%. The game scored 8/10 in *XBM*, though the review cautioned

[GameCube] Looking back, we're kind of amazed that *Buffy* ever became popular – the show was a bit crap [Ooft - Ed].

[PS2] *Play* seemed to think Namco should stick to the basics with *Time Crisis* – no fancy weaponry needed.

[GBA] A *Pokémon* game first and a pinball game second, *Pokémon Pinball Ruby & Sapphire* still reviewed pretty well.

[Xbox] There's nothing fishy going on here – it's just a licensed game for kids getting average reviews from adults.



[Xbox] If being purple was a virtue, *Alter Echo* would be great and the GameCube would have sold 100 million units.

against playing it "if you're someone who prefers technical perfection to gameplay". On the other end of the scale, *games™* wasn't keen on the "primitive platforming" and "functional combat", awarding 4/10 to a game that "manages to frustrate and disappoint more than it inspires or impresses". Less favourably received was the movie tie-in *Finding Nemo* (65% *NGC*, 55% *Play*, 4/10 *XBM*), which Play felt was "only made entertaining by the use of the Pixar characters."

But if *Finding Nemo* was a predictable disappointment, *Alter Echo* on Xbox and PS2 was a real downer. "After all the acclaim it received at E3, we were hoping for a truly gratifying arcade adventure, instead we've been given a woefully dull game that has few redeeming features," lamented *games™*, which gave the game 3/10. *Edge* felt that "true control of the environment could prove entertaining", but that "*Alter Echo*'s terraforming is even more facile than *Red Faction*'s," and scored it 4/10. *Play* felt it to be a "linear exercise in gameplay so familiar it's almost banal," giving it 46%.

Elsewhere on the PS2, you could find Namco's arcade lightgun conversion *Time Crisis 3* reviewed exclusively in *Play*. "These games should be about accuracy. That's the point," grumbled the reviewer. "Shotguns are not accurate. Grenades are not accurate." But while the addition of new weapons wasn't welcome, the addition of the new Rescue Mission mode and overall quality of the conversion earned it 90%.

On the PC, Polish developer Techland was making its first big move into the international gaming market with *Chrome* – but it probably wouldn't be sufficient to secure the developer's legacy. The first-person shooter earned 5/10 from *Edge*, which noted that "beautiful and organic levels" were accompanied by "pitiable" enemy AI and "unwelcome and badly implemented" boss battles. The biggest problem noted was with the Implant system, which it felt "players will be happier to ignore than exploit" due to the short duration and long recovery time of the boosts granted. The response from *games™* was slightly more favourable, with a 6/10 review noting that "virtually every aspect of the game seems to lack that final third of polish".

With the *Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire* RPGs already printing money for Nintendo as usual, the Christmas coffers would have to rely on *Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire* for a boost. *Edge* declared that it was "not a conventional pinball game with well-designed skillshots and a challenging layout", but appreciated the "countless secrets and hidden bonus areas to discover", scoring the game 7/10. In *games™* the sentiment was similar – while there were concerns that it was too easy ("probably for the benefit of younger fans"), it was considered to be "frustratingly addictive" and awarded 8/10.

Join us again next month, when we'll inevitably struggle to fit the hoard of Christmas blockbusters into the space we have! ✱

CHARTS

NOVEMBER 2003

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – EyeToy: Play (Sony)
2 – The Great Escape (SCI)
3 – Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb (LucasArts)
4 – Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness (Eidos)
5 – SOCOM: US Navy Seals (Sony)

XBOX

1 – Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic (LucasArts)
2 – Ghost Recon: Island Thunder (Ubisoft)
3 – FIFA 2003 (EA)
4 – The Great Escape (SCI)
5 – Medal Of Honor: Frontline (EA)

GAMECUBE

1 – Star Wars: Rogue Leader (LucasArts)
2 – Medal Of Honor: Frontline (EA)
3 – The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker (Nintendo)
4 – Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut (Sega)
5 – PN03 (Capcom)

MUSIC

1 – Crashed The Wedding (Busted)
2 – Me Against The Music (Britney Spears ft Madonna)
3 – Turn Me On (Kevin Lyttle)
4 – Slow (Kylie Minogue)
5 – Be Faithful (Fatman Scoop/ Crooklyn Clan)

THIS MONTH IN...

Play

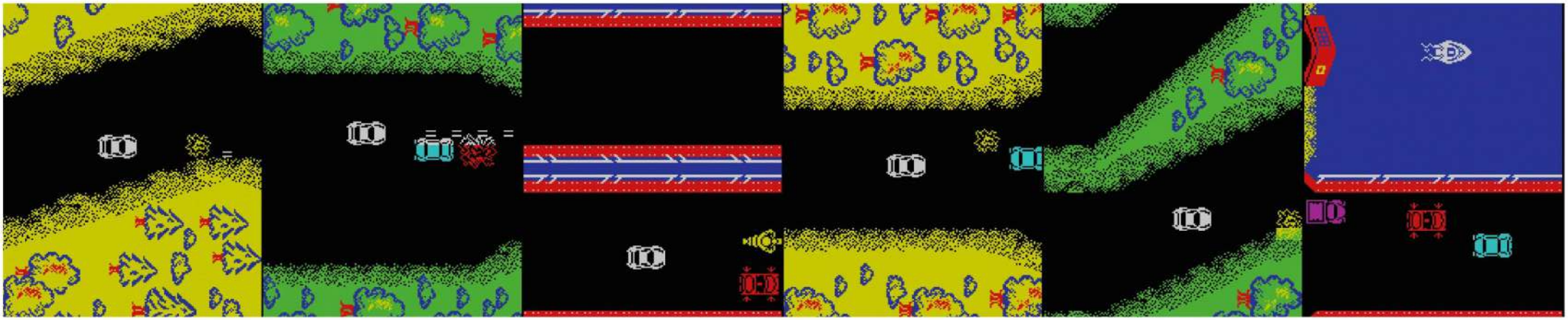
"I think that Sony is too uptight about copied games," says reader Daniel Hawthorne. "Sure, I know it wants to make money, so why doesn't it just sell a Sony-made chip?" Genius! That wouldn't alienate developers and publishers at all. We wonder if he also wrote to *Auto Trader* to suggest that Ford start selling branded crowbars to car thieves.

Edge

"*Edge* asks Suzuki-san a straight question: will *Shenmue III* ever be made? There's no firm answer. A hush descends on the room as PR representatives shuffle in their seats. A rather embarrassed Suzuki-san shrugs his shoulders, looks down at the table and eventually says, 'Not yet.'" He eventually got to make it – 16 years later, after leaving Sega.

NGC

"GameCube outsells PS2," shouts a headline that definitely doesn't smack of desperation. To be fair, this is true – but upon reading the story, you learn that this happened in Japan, for a single week, by a margin of 300 consoles. The reason? Namco launched its new RPG *Tales Of Symphonia*, which sold 194,000 in its opening weekend.



HIGHWAY

Spy Hunter

A REALLY MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1985 » US GOLD

It's funny what pops up in your head and how your synapses work together to pull out memories you'd long since forgotten about.

A Facebook post showed up in my feed the other day, and it was from an old school friend who was suffering from a rare illness and had decided to start blogging about it, so that others would have a better understanding of what he was going through. My first thought was a sad one; I vividly thought about his wife and young family, and the challenges they must now be facing – my second was *Spy Hunter* on the ZX Spectrum. That's quite a leap, so let me paint you a picture with my memory brush.

When I attended Alderney Middle School, my friend Richard used to live in the road directly across from it. Because of this fortuitous location he would often go home at lunchtimes and a couple of friends (myself included) would tag along with him. Several of my friends had Spectrums and Richard was no different. I discovered many fantastic games on those lunch excursions, including *Jet Set Willy, Sabre Wulf* and US Gold's conversion of *Spy Hunter*.

I loved *Spy Hunter* in the arcades, and the Spectrum version did a surprisingly good job of capturing the thrills and spills of the original machine. When Richard first got the game, he proudly told us how good it was, and there was no reason to not believe him (he had great taste in games, after all). His excitement for *Spy Hunter* was immense and it was further amplified by the excellent loading screen shown here that we all watched as we waited for the game to load. For me, that opening image casting a glow over our expectant faces is a perfect example of how a loading screen could whet your appetite for the main event, and it perfectly captured the carnage that the Spectrum port offered and Richard was promising us.

When I was finally able to take my turn, it quickly become obvious that Richard had purchased another corker, and seeing the vindicated expression on his face was just as satisfying as playing the game. Stay safe Richard, stay well and thanks for that lovely memory. *

You can read more about Richard's journey here: bit.ly/richtstory.

The Legacy of Monkey Island

When LucasArts created The Secret Of Monkey Island, it made a game that not only solidified it as one of the genre greats, but also proved games could be uproariously funny. As Guybrush and friends turn 30, we speak to the team that made some real monkey magic

WORDS BY HARETH AL BUSTANI, KONSTANTINOS DIMOPOULOS AND DARRAN JONES

It's somewhat poetic that the rights to *The Secret Of Monkey Island* have ended up at Disney, as it was a Disney theme park ride that partly inspired Ron Gilbert's hilarious point-and-click adventure. When Ron was looking for a follow-up to *Maniac Mansion*, which he designed with Gary Winnick, a love of pirates and Disney's Pirates Of The Caribbean ride – along with the adventure novel *On Stranger Tides* – gave him more than enough inspiration for an all-new point-and-click epic.

In fact, Ron's original idea for a pirate-themed game first came to him in 1988 after completing *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, although at this stage the likes of Guybrush Threepwood and villain LeChuck didn't exist. While there was interest in the idea at Lucasfilm Games (as LucasArts was then known), it was put on hold as Ron was working with various other Lucasfilm staff on *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade: The Graphic Adventure*. Even this diversion would prove beneficial, however, as the primitive dialogue system *Indiana Jones* employed would evolve for both *Monkey Island* and the many later LucasArts adventure games.

Monkey Island's core design team included Ron and two others, both of whom went on to help reshape the adventure game landscape during their time at LucasArts, and then elsewhere once the developer stopped making adventure games when the point-and-click genre began to tank in the late Nineties. Tim Schafer went on to release a number of high-profile adventure games for LucasArts, including *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*, and eventually left in 2000 to set up Double Fine Productions, which is currently celebrating its 20th anniversary. Dave Grossman was the third codesigner and writer of *Monkey Island*, and he too would have a big impact on the genre moving forwards, leaving LucasArts in 1994 and initially working freelance for Ron Gilbert at Humongous Entertainment (which Ron cofounded in 1992 with Shelley Day), and then creating a number of episodic adventure games for Telltale Games (another company founded by ex-LucasArts staff) including *Bone*, *Sam & Max* and *Tales Of Monkey Island*.

Ron's team found tremendous success with *Monkey Island*, leading to several sequels at LucasArts and culminating with the aforementioned *Tales Of Monkey Island* in 2009. Of course, humour in games was nothing new when *Monkey Island* debuted, but few games of the time could match the cutlass-sharp wit that was on display as Guybrush set out on his quest to become a mighty pirate. And it wasn't just the rapid-fire humour that made *Monkey Island* so popular. Everything about LucasArts' high-sea adventure screamed quality, from its engaging puzzles, to its glorious-looking pixel work and Steve Purcell's stunning box art – just look to your right to gaze at its glory. Bursting with energy and creative ideas (even the way copyright protection is handled in the game is a stroke of genius), *Monkey Island* helped cement LucasArts as one of the kings of the point-and-click adventure, a crown it held until the genre's demise.

While there was enough interest in the late Noughties for Disney to release a remaster of *Monkey Island* in 2009 (*LeChuck's Revenge* would follow in 2010), the franchise has been dormant ever since. Ron Gilbert himself publicly asked Disney to sell him the rights back in 2016, and an online petition was started the following year has currently amassed nearly 27,000 signatures, but so far Disney has remained quiet. It's unclear whether the game's 30th anniversary will make the publisher review the franchise's position, but what is clear from talking to its original developers over these 14 pages is that there's still plenty of love for both Guybrush's first adventure and the series in general. ▶

Meet Yaaar Crew

Ron Gilbert
DIRECTOR, CODESIGNER, WRITER

Tim Schafer
CODESIGNER, WRITER

Dave Grossman
CODESIGNER, WRITER

Steve Purcell
ARTIST, COVER ART

Mark Ferrari
ARTIST

Contents

20 Setting Sail
Ron Gilbert, Dave Grossman and Tim Schafer reveal the origins of their point-and-click classic.

22 Monkey Business
We look at the laughs and japes behind the hit game, including how its hilarious insult sword fighting came about.

24 Arrr-t Attack
Steve Purcell and Mark Ferrari discuss how the art style has evolved alongside the evolution of the franchise.

26 Mapping It Out
Mark Ferrari talks about the game's distinctive EGA style and takes you on a tour of the game world.

28 Monkey See, Monkey Do
We find out how the mind-bending puzzles were created and examine the best conundrums from the series.

30 The High Sea-quels
Explore the numerous sequels that Guybrush embarked on while we quiz Limited Run Games' Josh Fairhurst about an incoming *Monkey Island* collection.

Setting Sail

The Secret Of Monkey Island began with a simple desire to do better: as Ron Gilbert's vision filtered through his team of legends in the making, the result was a masterpiece for the ages

As soon as Ron Gilbert finished working on *Maniac Mansion*, he immediately started planning out his next big title. But, as the sales figures rolled in, he wondered why Sierra On-Line's *King's Quest* was outselling *Maniac Mansion* by so much. Perhaps, he thought, it was because *King's Quest* was a fantasy title – fantasy was all the rage, after all. "The problem was: I didn't like fantasy at all," he tells us.

"I really didn't want to make a game about dragons and orcs and all that stuff, so I started thinking about other genres and settings that could capture what I thought fantasy did – without actually being fantasy. One of the ideas I had was pirates."

When Ron was asked to work on *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* for Commodore 64, it gave him some much-needed breathing room to work everything out. Despite constantly going through different ideas for his pirate game, nothing stuck.

» The real secret of Monkey Island was the incredibly creative team behind the game, and Ron's abilities as a master collaborator. Photos courtesy of Tim Schafer.

"That's when I read the book *On Stranger Tides*." Suddenly, everything clicked into place.

"Firstly, the protagonist wasn't a pirate – he was a fish out of water," Ron explains. For a videogame, this made perfect sense. "That's one of the things that always bothered me about *Police Quest* – I was supposed to already be a police officer, yet I would lose the game and get fired because I didn't know that I was supposed to put my gun in my locker at the end of my shift. So I decided to have Guybrush be this fish out of water, and he literally says it in the very first line of the game: 'My name is Guybrush Threepwood and I want to be a pirate.' So that right there really aligned the player with the character."

The other aspect of *On Stranger Tides* that fit perfectly into Ron's vision was the use of voodoo. "It allowed the whole game to have this magical quality to it that wasn't really standard fantasy-type magic, but this weird voodoo-type magic, and that informed the character of LeChuck," Ron tells us.

As *Indiana Jones* drew to a close, Ron put together an eclectic team of nine for what was

» [PC] Our plucky hero Guybrush was named after a placeholder filename for a character sprite.

Meet The Cast

THE KEY HEROES AND VILLAINS... AND ONE INSUFFERABLE SALESMAN

Guybrush Threepwood

■ Guybrush is a goofy, yet witty, young lad who desperately wants to be a pirate. Though well-meaning, he's not afraid to do some pretty questionable things along the way.

Elaine Marley

■ Bold and beautiful, the governor of Mêlée Island, ends up the object of both Guybrush's and LeChuck's affections. She and Guybrush eventually hitched in *The Curse Of Monkey Island* – though Ron never intended for this to happen.

LeChuck

■ LeChuck is perhaps the world's most bloodthirsty pirate. Driven by a lust for power, and his beloved Elaine, he simply refuses to stay dead. Naturally, he loathes Guybrush.

Stan

■ Stan is a fast-talking motormouth, who always has something to hawk. His suit is as loud as his voice, with an amusing pattern that remains stationary, even as the rest of his body flails about wildly.

Voodoo Lady

■ The Voodoo Lady has a habit of turning up just when Guybrush needs her the most. Although she has plenty of seemingly absurd trinkets for sale, this lady knows her voodoo magic.

[PC] The decision to make Guybrush a fish out of water was a stroke of genius, aligning his and the gamer's adventures together.

"IF I'M STARTING A NEW GAME, I'LL GO THROUGH MONKEY ISLAND AND MONKEY ISLAND 2 AND TRY TO RECAPTURE WHAT MADE THOSE GAMES SO SPECIAL. I DON'T KNOW THAT I'VE EVER REALLY FIGURED IT OUT"
Ron Gilbert

tentatively known as '*Mutiny On Monkey Island*'. Having already begun designing the game's puzzles and story, he brought in Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman to program and cowrite the game. Tim and Dave were two of Lucasfilm's newest 'SCUMMlets' – having trained in Ron's SCUMM engine. When the three weren't at the office, they were at Ron's house, soaking in Errol Flynn movies, or catching up on the *Simpsons* and *Twin Peaks*.

Tim, today the president and CEO of Double Fine Productions, laughs, "Before my interview, I bought a copy of *Zak McKracken*, and I was so poor that I returned it afterwards." He loved the intuitive SCUMM engine, saying it "really affected how I looked at scripting languages", because it was designed specifically for adventure games. He describes it as "very room-oriented" adding, "You would just say 'walk Guybrush to window', and 'stop here', 'wait for him to get there', then 'say this line' – it was like you were describing it in English."

The only graphic adventure game Dave had played up to that point was the risqué *Leisure Suit Larry* – which he borrowed from a roommate, "To me, they were kind of like little movies," Dave says. He relished the daily brainstorming meetings, where artist Steve Purcell would often sit in, drawing funny illustrations. Dave, who now makes audio story games for Earplay, recalls, "I wrote a poem once about ideas being like lint and dust – they're just kind of floating around everywhere and the real trick is to make something interesting out of them."

Steve says Ron was a brilliant collaborator, "Ron always had some reference in mind to point to but he was open to exploration. It's that flexibility in merging the art and writing and following it where it wants to go that is an asset to a creator." At the time, movable sprites were referred to as 'brushes', and when Steve saved the hitherto nameless male character sprite, he called the file 'guybrush.bbm'. Before long, the 'guybrush' was formally named Guybrush Threepwood.

Michael Land was brought on to do the music, and Ron expressed his vision of a soundtrack inspired by steel drums and calypso. "Michael just kind of took that and ran with it, and came up with brilliant music," Ron remembers.

While Ron declines our offer to explain what the secret of Monkey Island really is, the secret of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* seems to be the group dynamic. Tim says, "The artwork was amazing, the music was amazing; Ron didn't go around telling everyone, 'You've got to do better,' because everyone on the team was a perfectionist who just wanted to do amazing work." ▶

[PC] After reading *On Stranger Tides*, Ron realised voodoo magic could be a perfect alternative to high fantasy.

Herman Toothrot

■ Once the acclaimed governor of the Tri-Island Area, Herman Toothrot has since lost his memory, having spent two decades marooned on Monkey Island – where he enjoys a feud with the local 'cannibals'.

The Crew

■ Every pirate needs a crew. Guybrush's consists of Meathook, who lost both his hands in a parrot attack, a thief called Otis and Carla – master of not just the sword, but epic verbal put-downs.

The Cannibals

■ Although they used to feast on wayward tourists, Monkey Island's cannibals have since grown health-conscious and disavowed red meat. After moving to Blood Island, they later go full vegan.

Murray

■ Murray is a loud, obnoxious demonic skull, on a mission to terrorise the entire Caribbean. He first appears in *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, when Guybrush fires a cannon at his ship, relieving his body of its head.

Morgan LeFlay

■ Although Morgan doesn't appear until *Tales Of Monkey Island*, this bounty hunter is among the most beloved characters in the *Monkey Island* universe. A mighty pirate indeed.

Monkey Business

Asides from great design, Monkey Island delivered a laugh a minute in its own distinctive way, bringing together satire, sarcasm, anachronism and farce to side-splitting effect

» [PC] While the health-conscious cannibals were inspired by late Eighties diet trends, the three-headed-monkey was an in-joke by Tim that Ron decided to leave in.

Ron Gilbert

What were your biggest comedic influences?
A lot of my non sequitur humour comes from *Monty Python*, and I think that makes its way into *Monkey Island*. I also loved Mel Brooks' movies like *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*.

What was your favourite Easter egg?
I don't know if you'd call it an Easter egg, but certainly Guybrush dying after spending ten minutes underwater. I don't know how often that happens to people or if they figure out the puzzle within ten minutes – it certainly wasn't meant to be a super hard puzzle.

» [PC] There was one way of dying in the game – after all, Guybrush does say he can only hold his breath for ten minutes.

When you were writing jokes, did you have any particular audience in mind?
I didn't really think about, 'Oh there's this type of person I want to appeal to, so I should make these kinds of jokes, but not make these kind of jokes.' The team was just entertaining ourselves making this game and we were all laughing at it.

How did you decide who would write what?
When I would look at a section of the game, depending on the humour that I wanted for it, I would decide which of the three of us was going to write that. Dave Grossman has a very sophisticated, slightly sarcastic type of humour to him, so if there were scenes that I thought called for that, I would have Dave work on those.

Tim Schafer

How did you come up with the Three-Headed Monkey gag?
I was writing the villagers, and it was the stupidest thing I could think of. I just needed them to turn around for a second, so I was like, 'Look behind you, a three-headed monkey.' Ron was watching us do that dialogue and he got to that line, and I was like, 'That's just temporary, we'll come up with something,' and he was like, 'No, we're keeping it.' And then he was like, 'You know what would be funny, is if we had Steve [Purcell] do an actual three-headed monkey.' And so, Steve did that monkey, and added the joke where one monkey eats the banana and the other one chews it and the other one swallows it.

Who came up with the idea of the health-conscious vegan cannibals?
That was the era of fat-free diets, the late Eighties and early Eighties. My sister and my mom were big into that, and we were just talking about how strict their diets were. I just remember we were talking about that and then I was like, 'I'm really stuck on these villagers…' Ron went, 'Just make them really health conscious, they don't want to eat too much fat,' so they ended up being vegan cannibals.

How did the SCUMM bar get its name?
Mark [Ferrari] told me he painted that in there as a joke, because he didn't know what the name of the bar was, so he called it the SCUMM bar and he put a smiley face as a wink to Ron, like 'rename this whatever you want', and Ron just left it.

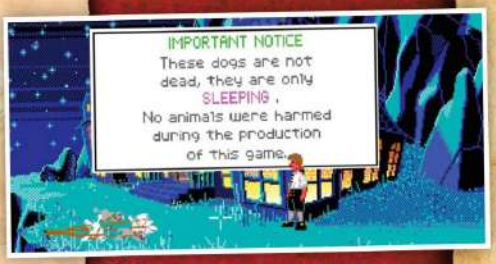
Dave Grossman

What were the 'pizza orgies'?
We would have people that we knew come in after hours, and we would feed them lots of pizza and soda and have them play the game for a few hours, and just kind of watch what happened. Part of that was, 'Let's see where they're laughing and where they're not.'

How did the Rubber Tree joke come about?
That was my misunderstanding of a piece of art that resulted in that whole gag. There was a crack drawn on the place where you were supposed to be standing. At first I thought, 'Did I miss a meeting? Was there some puzzle, where you're not supposed to go over there?' I asked around and it was like, 'No, no, I just drew that to make it look interesting,' but I was inspired, so I was like, 'Well, I can use DPaint – I'll make a background version of this where that part has fallen away, and animate a little thing, and throw Guybrush right over the cliff.' Morning came around, and that was in the game.

Do any favourite jokes spring to mind?
I loved the gag where you keep sending the shopkeeper out to go and find the Swordmaster. It's probably one that I also like as a puzzle a lot, too, because it's not just, 'Use thing with other thing and get results,' you have to be paying attention.

» [PC] George Lucas makes a hilarious cameo, as the troll guarding the bridge.


IMPORTANT NOTICE
These dogs are not dead, they are only SLEEPING.
No animals were harmed during the production of this game.

» [PC] Every inch of the game oozes with Ron Gilbert's love of sarcastic, anachronistic and non sequitur humour.

» [PC] Mark Ferrari named the SCUMM bar as a joke, after the game engine, and left in a smiley face, to let Ron know to replace it – the name stuck.

» [PC] The infamous Rubber Tree, satirising Sierra On-Line deaths, came about when Dave spotted a crack in the background art and decided to run with it.

A War Of Words

HOW RON AND HIS TEAM DEVISED INSULT SWORD FIGHTING

One of the major issues Ron had with Sierra games was how "they started to throw action" into their adventure games, with "arcade sections where you had to rely on quick reflexes to get through stuff". To him, adventure games were about logic. "We had to have some sort of sword fighting in a pirate game, but I didn't want to do a twitch-type game, and that's where the insults worked perfectly, because now the sword fighting became puzzle-solving."

The eureka moment came during one of Ron's regular sessions, when he got the team together to watch old Errol Flynn-era pirate movies for inspiration. "One of the things that I noticed from watching those movies was how much time they spent talking to each other; how much time they spent insulting each other, and throwing barbs at each other. And it just seemed to me from watching those movies that it was really more about that than it was about actual sword fighting."

Tim recalls the issue of sword fighting came up during one of the team's daily afternoon brainstorming sessions. "Those brainstorm sessions that Ron set up in the afternoon – I still always try and do those in the same way – we would be like, 'We're in this room, and we're not going to leave until we have two puzzles.'"

At the time, Tim was still wondering what type of action mechanics the sword fighting sequences should follow. When Ron suggested replacing the action completely for a dialogue-based insult trade-off, Tim was worried people would feel really "ripped off" if they didn't actually get to sword fight. "I was like, 'I don't know if people are going to like this insult sword fighting, because I think they're going to expect it to be like a *Karateka* sword fighting style: high attack, medium attack, low attack; high block, medium block, low block,'" he remembers.

However, Ron went with his gut, in what turned out to be a visionary move. Tim adds, "I think that was a really brave creative choice to make – I couldn't believe we were doing it. It was the right thing to do, for sure, and I didn't fight it for very long. I think those lessons from Ron about not being so scared about weird ideas that you haven't seen before, but in fact fighting for those exact ideas, was a lesson I've carried with me to this day." ▶

"I DON'T THINK ANYONE WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT THE GAME WOULD ENDURE FOR DECADES, OR END UP IN A MUSEUM. WE WERE TRYING TO CREATE SOMETHING WE COULD BE PROUD OF"
Steve Purcell

Arrr-t Attack

As well as pioneering game design, The Secret Of Monkey Island raised the bar on what videogames could look like, with cutting-edge graphics, sensational style and technical brilliance

» A commercial artist with no prior computing experience, Mark Ferrari was dissatisfied with *Zak McKracken*'s use of the 16-colour EGA pallet

» [PC] While Mark was responsible for "beauty shots", Steve says he took on anything "funny or creepy".

[PC] Shortly before *LOOM*, Ron and Gary Winnick found a way to compress dithered graphics – allowing Mark's talents to soar.

The *Monkey Island* universe erupts with its riotous theme soaring over a moody landscape; stars twinkling beautifully over the layered silhouette of Mêlée Island's rolling cliffs. As Guybrush strolls into the pirate town, a stunning sunset sprawls from the horizon, over the sea, enveloping the scene in a glorious glow. These were cutting-edge graphics like nothing adventure gamers had ever seen before – a shot across the bow from commercial illustrator Mark Ferrari, who, before Lucasfilm, had "never even touched a computer before".

Mark's first videogame project was *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, and though he mastered the DPaint tool quickly, he found the colour restraints of the EGA palette extremely dissatisfying. "You only had 16 colours, and worse yet, those 16 colours were fixed," he recalls, adding, "it was like this acid chartreuse green, an acid hot pink and this mustardy brown".

His solution was to develop the dithering technique; drawing pixels of alternating colours in chequerboard patterns, to create a broader palette. Because CRT monitors tended to blur a little, the effect was magnified. Ron and the head of art, Gary Winnick, were so impressed by one of Mark's EGA scenes, they found a way to compress the dithered graphics. After putting the technique into practice on *LOOM*, Mark laughs, "*Monkey Island* was kind of my PhD thesis in dithered EGA artwork."

Ron told Mark he wanted the game to feel like Disney's Pirates Of The Caribbean ride. He adds, "I don't think I've ever met a computer artist that has the sense of lighting that Mark does. And really, the first five or ten minutes of the Pirates Of The Caribbean ride is all about lighting."

While Mark brought a sense of Dutch Masters depth, perspective and atmospheric lighting, *Sam & Max* creator Steve Purcell defined the game's style and visual language. The two split locations between themselves – Mark usually taking on the beauty shots and Steve taking on anything "funny or creepy".

Steve says *Monkey Island* was built on the visual innovations of its predecessors. "*Last Crusade* had opened up the compositions a bit more. *Zak McKracken* and *Maniac Mansion* had

Reinventing Monkey Island

HOW DOES THE SPECIAL EDITION SHAPE UP TO THE ORIGINAL?

In 2009, shortly after Telltale answered *Monkey Island* fans' prayers with a brand-new sequel, LucasArts added a cherry on the cake – with the *Special Edition* of *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. The classic game was given a visual overhaul, with hand-drawn illustrations laid over the original graphics, a sweeping orchestral score and full voice acting – utilising the talents made famous by *The Curse Of Monkey Island*.

The game accommodates a more modern audience, with the inclusion of an in-game hint system. Such features are reflective of changing times – Ron says players simply have different expectations of games today. "Nobody spends three days trying to solve a puzzle, you spend three minutes trying to solve a puzzle, and then you jump to the internet and find a walkthrough guide."

Designers today, he adds, simply can't make games the way they did back then. "I never, ever would have thought of adding a hint guide in a game like *Monkey Island* back then." However, when he was working on his most recent title, *Thimbleweed Park*, "We really had to build the hint guide into the game, because people expect it."

» [PC] While the classic art style is timeless, the *Special Edition* does a good job at retaining the original's mood, while giving it a modern flourish.

"I LIKE TO THINK THAT GAMES PUT SOMETHING GOOD INTO THE WORLD – AND IF PEOPLE ARE LAUGHING, THEY CAN'T BE BEATING EACH OTHER UP AT THE SAME TIME – THOSE TWO DON'T GENERALLY GO HAND IN HAND"

Dave Grossman

used more formalised stage sets. Our characters were smaller so we had more room for them to inhabit the backgrounds and I believe we had character scaling in *Indy*, so we could create more of an oblique ground plane and anticipate characters going into the distance."

Like Mark, who has since created the Living Worlds app and the online serial *TWICE*, Steve saw technological limitations as an opportunity to innovate. "As far as animation, the characters were too small to actually define most of their features, so we depended on expressive animation whenever possible. Stan is a good example of that. His whole body is defining his character."

Although *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* maintained the original's aesthetic, it was given a serious facelift to VGA – expanding its palette to 256 colours. Moreover, the revised SCUMM engine gave the game a visual inventory, bringing all those weird and wonderful items to life. The *Secret Of Monkey Island* would later be given the same treatment, with a CD-ROM version, featuring a stunning MP3 soundtrack.

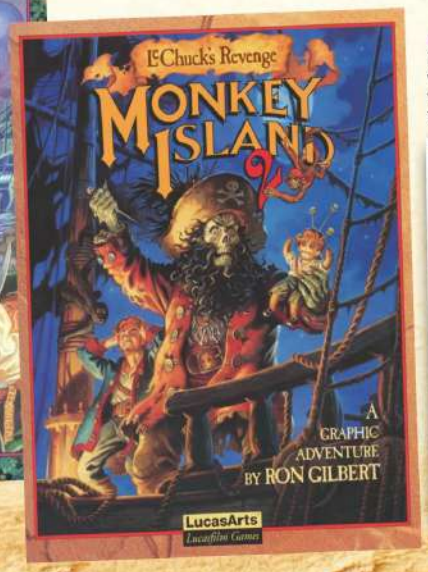
Steve Purcell's original cover art for the first two *Monkey Island* games were incredibly lifelike, akin to an NC Wyeth book cover, which he says gave gamers an opportunity to "see the characters as they would appear, when we had no technical limitations of the games themselves". However, after Ron departed LucasArts, the franchise was given a makeover by Larry Ahern for 1997's *The Curse Of Monkey* Island – ditching the dark for larger-than-life Disney-esque visuals. After *Monkey Island 2*, Larry worked with Tim Schafer on *Day Of The Tentacle*. Tim says, "That's why his version of Guybrush looks a lot like Bernard Bernoulli, with his pelvis thrust forwards and tiny ankles."

» [PC] *Monkey Island* kicks off with one of Mark's iconic EGA scenes, bringing new levels of lighting, atmosphere and depth to adventure gaming.

» [PC] After *Monkey Island 2*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was given its own facelift, with VGA graphics in 256 colours, and a visual inventory.

He continues, "After *Monkey Island 2*, it's a totally different thing. Guybrush looks different and he's got bad hair; he was never supposed to be that tall and skinny." The next iteration, *Escape From Monkey Island* took another leap, carrying the aesthetic into 3D – using *Grim Fandango*'s GrimE engine. The game was revived once again for Telltale's 2009 *Tales Of Monkey Island* series – featuring a more powerful, modern engine.

Although he wishes Guybrush and Elaine never got married, Ron says, "I think everybody that's done *Monkey Island* games since then has done a really good job of them – and I think they've been very respectful of the world that was created." Steve adds that the game's soul is more about its combination of humour and illustrative art than anything else: "Whatever is fun and tells the story is the right choice." ▶



» Steve Purcell's cover art intended to show players what the *Monkey Island* world would look like, without technological restrictions.

More Monkeying Around

WAIT... THERE'S ANOTHER SPECIAL EDITION!?

***The Secret Of Monkey Island* was not the only game to get a makeover – *LeChuck's Revenge* benefitted from the same thoughtful approach.** While the original *Monkey Island 2* stripped out some of *Monkey Island*'s more redundant verbs, the *Special Edition* does away with words completely. Instead, it offers a true point-and-click experience, allowing players to interact with people and things by simply clicking on them.

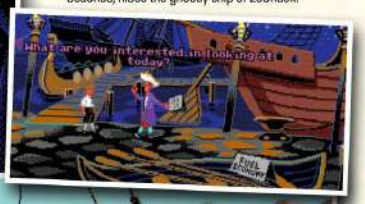
Once again, the high-quality music and voice acting add a welcome dimension to the game, while making it more visually appealing to those unaccustomed to classic games. Some, however, have argued that amidst all the bells and whistles, much of the original charm has been lost. Visually, the game is a hybrid between the title's original darker style, and the later exaggerated comic form of the post-*Curse* titles. Although the game allows players to swap over to the original VGA version, Guybrush's *Special Edition* hair has proved particularly controversial. Tim reflects, "To me, a high-resolution version of *Monkey Island* should look like the [original] cover art from *Monkey Island* which is Steve Purcell's, but that's my personal take on that – some people would not like that, for sure."

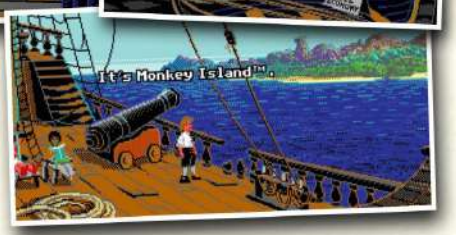
Mapping It Out

The precision and painterly beauty of EGA Monkey Island has been described by Mark Ferrari as a doctoral thesis on dithering, where experience and conscious decisions crafted a vibrant fantasy setting using only 16 colours

» [PC] The underground rivers and caverns of Monkey Island where, below tropical jungles and beaches, hides the ghostly ship of LeChuck.

» [PC] It might be a bit out of shape, but the captain's quarters of the Sea Monkey feature a properly piratey bed.





» [PC] Arriving at the beautiful shores of Monkey Island on board the Sea Monkey is most fulfilling.

How strongly did EGA influence your artistic choices?
Back then, art was never designed in separation from technical limitations. Disk storage capacity and our palette determined it to a great degree. *LOOM* and *Secret Of Monkey Island* take place at twilight and night, because the strongest part of the EGA palette is its blues. There were more blues in the EGA palette than there were any other colours.

What was your illustrating process?
I drew on-screen with a mouse. I didn't sketch out anything on paper. With the notable exception of Mêlée Town, I didn't even have any visual reference. I just sat down making lines and filling and dithering shapes on-screen. The reason was that the colours and resolution were so limited that almost nothing in preliminary pencil sketches would have been transferable anyway. You use reference to be aware of details that your mind normally forgets or get complex lighting correct. There is virtually no complex lighting when working with EGA, and there are no details.

How did such a fantasy, piratical, humorous world become a reality?
There were three sources for all of that. Visually, the biggest influence was the Pirates Of The Caribbean ride. It was the most interesting and exciting in those days, and though nowhere near Disneyland, we'd all been there and loved it. This is also a ride that's set entirely at night, and, luckily, we had an EGA palette that lent itself towards night scenes. The humour, dialogue and pirate ethos in *Secret Of Monkey Island* were entirely Steve Purcell and Ron Gilbert. As for the fantasy part, the ghosts and such, the 'high fantasy' guy in the room was probably me. I probably brought traditional fantasy to the conversation, and Steve Purcell took it and ran with it. Mostly, I just drew and lit what *they* imagined.

» [PC] This dark, deserted, and appropriately ominous alley does reappear in *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's* Revenge.

Did you approach the islands as cohesive, continuous spaces?
On one level, yes, I did think of the islands as a contiguous space. We did do the overhead map early on for obvious reasons; it was helpful to know where things were in relation to each other. I do tend – not just in this game – to envision a whole world when creating. I almost never think in isolated details. I think in systems. So, when I drew a vista, you bet I looked at the map and figured out what part of the shoreline is this actually looking towards.

But, two thirds of the game were drawn by somebody else. Now that we were using dithering, personal artistic style suddenly became visible again. It became clear which things I drew, and which things Steve Purcell or Mike Ebert drew, and we didn't want a game where each screen belonged in another world. We solved that by divvying up environments. I would do all the artwork for the pirate town, Steve for the cannibals' village, Mike Ebert for the interiors of pirate buildings etc. We disguised the shift in styles by overlapping it with shifts in place. So I never really 'saw' a lot of Mêlée Island while we were making it, which limited my sense of cohesive continuous space there some.

What was your favourite thing about working on *Monkey Island*?
When it comes to the game itself, certainly the biggest pleasure was getting to exercise the maximum potential of dithered EGA. It was satisfying to do screens that looked and felt like places, with space and distance and atmosphere and light – not just solid fields of garish EGA colour.

The other thing that was fun for me were the humour and the creativity. Ron and Steve and the others weren't just talented, these guys were super intelligent, super creative and funny as hell. Dialogue, names and puzzles came out of our laughing conversations, and that back and forth with funny, intelligent people was more fun than I can say. Actually, being on Skywalker Ranch with people of this calibre – and I was there for three years – was more fun and growth-stimulating than anything I've done since.

Would you work in EGA again?
I saw modern pixel art on Twitter and was amazed by what they were drawing, and the way they were drawing it. These people loved pixels. They weren't just trying to overcome them, like we were. I was not looking at illustrations. I was looking at art. I was looking at people like Octavi Navarro using pixels as a medium of choice, and not just a compromise with unavoidable technical limitations. It's visual poetry as opposed to visual prose, and if I had some time and a tool as usable as DPaint, I might actually do pixel art again. Probably though not in EGA. I feel like I took that palette as far as I could on *Monkey Island*. ▶

"MAYBE THE LESSON IS: ALWAYS DO THE BEST YOU CAN, SINCE EVERYTHING YOU MAKE HAS THE POSSIBILITY TO EXIST FOREVER"
Steve Purcell

The EGA Secrets Of The Islands

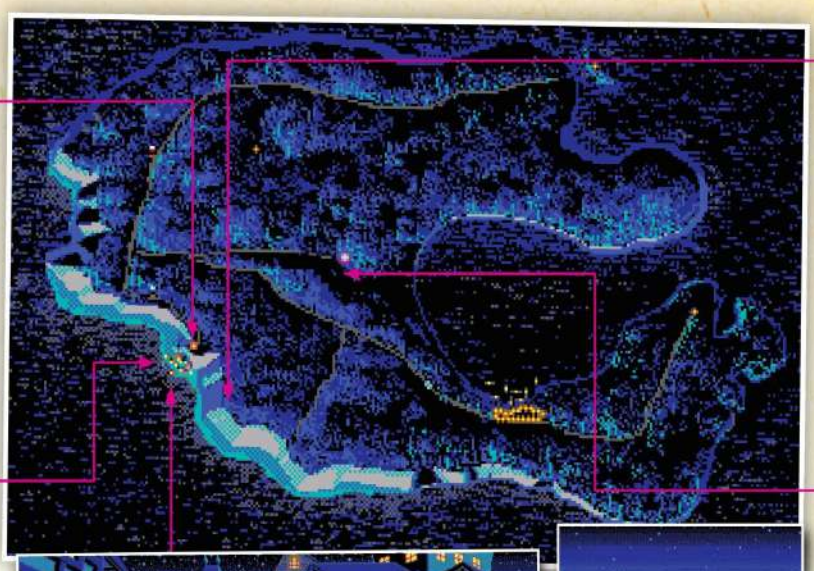
MARK FERRARI GUIDES US AROUND THE 16 COLOURS AND KEY LOCATIONS OF MÊLÉE AND MONKEY ISLAND

Lookout Point

■ Here Guybrush introduces himself, and Mark Ferrari thinks he first tried colour cycling in Deluxe Paint II to animate the bonfire. Four colours were used. Creatively, and to overcome EGA's limitations, grey was employed to highlight firelight reflections on stone.

The Church

■ "The one interior I remember doing. The stained glass windows were homages to the ones in *LOOM*, but what I love about this scene is that the turning edge effect on the pillars and draperies was king of an EGA tour de force, that came as close to traditional illustration as I could in that palette."



Mêlée Town

■ "Ron Gilbert loved inventive camera angles and weird perspectives, but we couldn't make multiple versions of animations. Buildings were carefully distorted to *feel* in forced perspective in this scene without requiring actual shifts in line tilt as the background scrolled, or character redraws. I am pretty certain I worked on the clock tower street from photographic reference."

The Seas of Mêlée

■ "The sunset that appears as the game begins to then give its place to a night sky is my favourite scene. An early, pre-*LOOM*, version of this image was instrumental in convincing Lucasfilm to start working on compressing dither."

Governor's Mansion

■ "For the governor's mansion I reversed forced perspective so that it matched the false forced perspective style of the town, and looked distorted and comical rather than looming and correct. I was referencing memories of the Victorian mansion trope, while playing with blues and their dithered combinations. "

The Circus

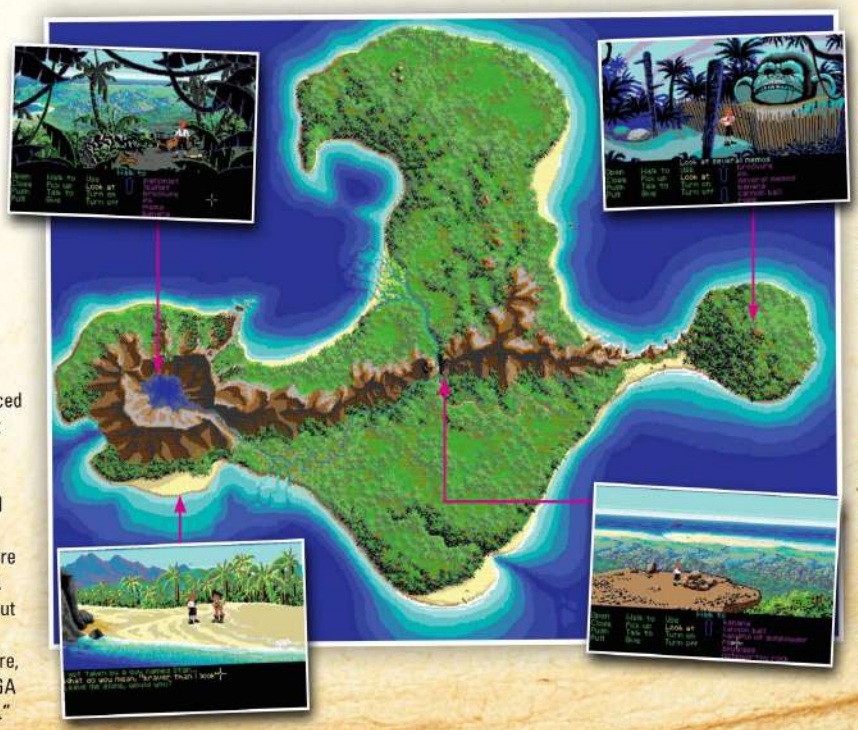
■ The Fantastic Flying Fettucini Brothers Circus was not one of Mark Ferrari's creations, but it wonderfully showcased the demented logic, wild anachronisms and bold contrasts that defined most of the *Monkey Island* series.

The Fort

■ "My primary focus as an artist originally was fine art landscapes. What makes me proud here is the atmospheric perspective. The way the foreground looks near and vivid, and how the world fades and becomes lighter and bluer in the distance – in just 16 awful EGA colours."

Monkey Island Beach

■ "The limitations of the palette forced you towards clear decisions. Look at the water. The shift between warm turquoise and deep blue signifies changes in depth. For the sand, I had to create wind patterns to render highlights and shadows because there wasn't enough 'sand' colours in EGA to render a 'smooth' transition without the use of pattern. There were no 'careless' muddy 'colour' choices here, because the extreme limitation of EGA colour options literally didn't allow it."



Giant Monkey Head

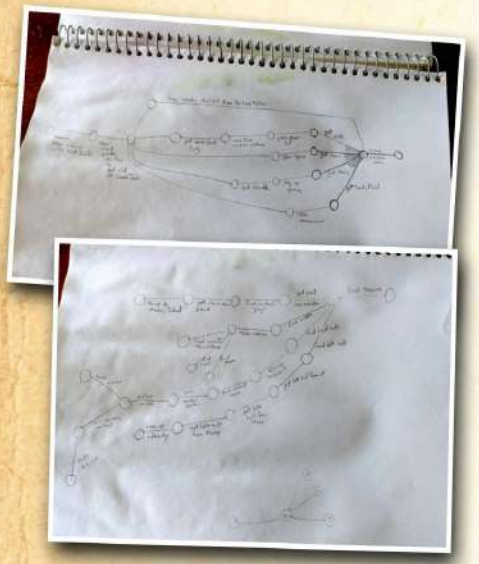
■ This major, outrageous landmark was one of the backgrounds that Mark did not work on. Still, its iconic, crisp EGA version makes for a beautiful scene that strongly benefitted from the dithering techniques Mark championed within Lucasfilm.

The Rocky Ledge

■ "The only colours I had to make sand with were gray, yellow, and white. None of the browns in the foreground pillar are in the EGA palette. Brown and light or dark gray were checkerboarded together to get real browns."

Monkey See, Monkey Do

Inspired by what he saw as some serious problems in the adventure genre, Ron Gilbert put his design 'manifesto' into practice with The Secret Of Monkey Island



» Over *Monkey Island* and *Monkey Island 2*, Ron Gilbert developed an elaborate series of puzzle charts, showing how the various strands linked together.

In 1989, as he got to work on *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, Ron Gilbert published a 'manifesto' called *'Why Adventure Games Suck'*. The piece drew attention to what the genre was doing wrong, taking particular exception to arbitrary puzzle designs. Although *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was the 'proof' of the manifesto, Ron laughs, "It wasn't like I finished the game, went home, opened up the manifesto and went, 'Well, let's see how I did today.'"

Ron believed there were too many redundant deaths and dead ends in adventure games. "One of the things that really bugged me – not just about the Sierra games, but adventure games in general, the text adventures and everything else – was that you could forget to solve a puzzle early on in the game and be completely screwed five or six hours later." Right at the end of Sierra's *King's Quest V*, if you didn't have a piece of cheese in your inventory, you would die and lose the game. To get that oh-so-important cheese, you had to get captured, then spot an incredibly obscure mouse hole, and then think to use a hook on it (which you need to have picked up earlier in the game).

» [PC] The secret to sneaking aboard a ghost pirate ship is fitting in.

"That was one of the hardest things to do with *Monkey Island* – to make sure that no matter what the player had done, and no matter what puzzles they had or hadn't solved, that the game was still playable." Ron's solution was to work backwards, and make sure the player could never progress the story forward without having already picked up the items they would need later on. So, if players needed a certain set of items to cast a voodoo spell on the journey to Monkey Island, the game had to make sure they already had those items before the ship

Perfect Puzzlers

FIVE OF THE BEST PUZZLES FROM THE MONKEY ISLAND SERIES

Insult Sword Fighting

■ Without a doubt, *Monkey Island*'s most iconic puzzle. As Guybrush travels along Mêlée Island, he has to spar with scores of pirates, learning insults in preparation for a showdown with the Swordmaster. Then, he has to think on his toes, applying what he has learnt against the Swordmaster, who has an entirely new set of put-downs.

Finding The Swordmaster

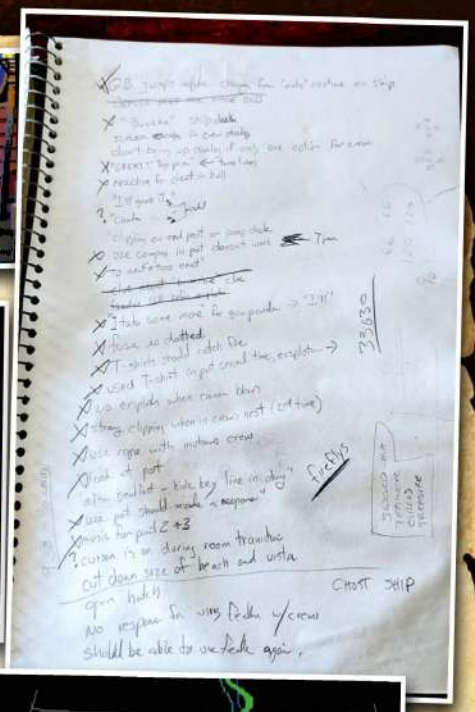
■ Before Guybrush can defeat the Swordmaster, he must first wade through the forest to find her. The only person who knows where she lives is the cranky old shopkeeper, a long-time admirer of hers. Dave Grossman loved the puzzle, because it utilised the game's mechanics in unexpected ways.

Prison Break

■ Guybrush can't set sail for Monkey Island without a crew – and one of the few candidates is locked behind bars. The solution is simple enough – pour a mug of seriously potent grog on the lock, dissolving it. The hard part is figuring out how to transport it across town, before the mug itself dissolves.

» [PC] How better to navigate the fiery depths of *Monkey Island* than with the magic severed Head Of The Navigator?

» [PC] Some of *Monkey Island*'s puzzles are delightfully deranged – using a rubber chicken as a zip line? Yeah, sure!



left. "That just made the puzzle design a lot more complicated," Ron highlights.

Ron mapped out all of the puzzles in advance, eventually developing what he called puzzle dependency charts – which resembled flow charts. "By building these puzzle dependency charts, you really ensured that there were no dead ends, because if you ever created dead ends, the dependency charts just didn't hook up correctly. So, that was really the thing that kept me honest."

Despite this approach, there was still some flexibility in the process – Ron hadn't mapped the entire game out in advance. He worked out the main flow of the puzzles, and how they progressed the story along, and worked out the minute details on a daily basis. "I don't recommend that people do that, but that's the way it was done back then," he adds.

Tim Schafer recalls the design process, "We were all involved in brainstorming puzzles, for sure, but Ron was the one who made the charts – he made these big connectivity charts and puzzles, with all the steps broken down into a flow chart." Ron, Tim and Dave Grossman would meet every day to hammer out jokes, puzzles and other ideas, before going their own ways and working things out.

The first thing Tim was assigned to do was the dialogue for Stan the ship salesman. "I was taking it really seriously," he remembers. "So, I talked to my uncle, who had just bought a used car. He was like, 'They really rip you off. They try to sell you all these extras and the secret is you have to walk away at least once to get them to take you seriously.'" His uncle even gave him a book on buying used cars, called *Don't Get Taken Every Time*. "And so that's why the puzzle was you have to say no to all the extras, and you have to walk away at least once to get the deal you want," he laughs.

Dave also chimed in, telling Tim about the notorious used car salesman, Cal Worthington – whose face adorned televisions across California. "Tim grew up in Northern California, where they didn't have Cal Worthington, so I had to kind of describe him – but it wasn't that hard, because the kind of loud-clothes-wearing, fast-talking car salesman is almost a universal stereotype."

Eventually, *Monkey Island* was put to the ultimate test in the infamous 'pizza orgies' – where family and friends poured into the office after hours, to feast on pizza and play through the game. This gave the team a great idea of where puzzles weren't quite landing. "If something was stumping people, it usually meant that there was just something they didn't know or they didn't understand about what the situation was supposed to be," Dave adds. "That could be solved a lot of the time by just interjecting some important information, and making sure that they saw that before they got to the moment when they were supposed to solve the puzzle." ▶

» [PC] After outlining '*Why Adventure Games Suck*', Ron used *Monkey Island* to show how to do it right; no arbitrary puzzles, and no dead ends.

» [PC] *Monkey Island*'s puzzles were designed thoughtfully – Ron wanted them to be challenging, but logical.

Voodoo Doll

■ The design process was more collaborative on *Monkey Island 2*. Consequently, its puzzles were even more complex than its predecessor's – often linking together into puzzle chains. A standout conundrum is where Guybrush must create a voodoo doll of Scabb Island's resident bully, Largo LaGrande.

Crew Blues

■ In *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, putting together a ship and crew to set sail to Blood Island is as complicated as ever. One particular highlight is figuring out how to beat refined pirate-turned-hairdresser Edward Van Helgen in a duel. The secret lies in the banjo case, hidden behind the row of guns…

"I'M SOMEONE WHO REALLY RESPECTS ORIGINAL CREATORS, AND I'D ALWAYS WANT RON TO BE IN CONTROL OF IT BUT I FEEL LIKE MONKEY ISLAND HAS BEEN THROUGH SO MANY HANDS THAT IT ALMOST BELONGS TO THE WORLD NOW – TO THE FANS, TO SO MANY PEOPLE"

Tim Schafer

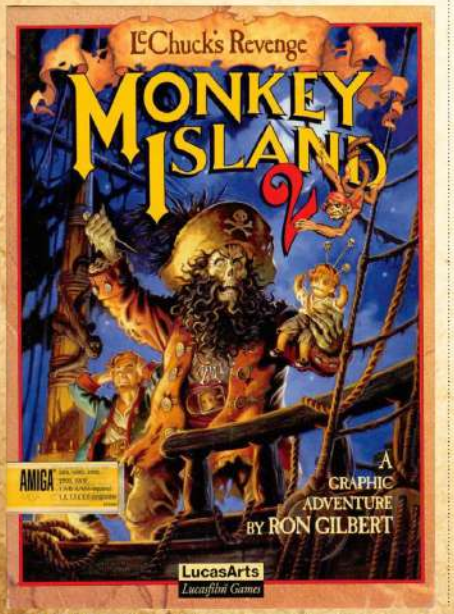
The High Sea-quels

While the series currently lies dormant, the original Monkey Island was popular enough to spawn four sequels. Although each of the games featured here were often manned by a new crew, they are all (largely) worthy of the Monkey Island name

Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge

RELEASED: 1991

Widely considered as the best game in the series, it's easy to see why *LeChuck's Revenge* is so acclaimed. Pretty much every aspect of the original was improved in this sequel, with the streamlined verb interface and new item menu being notable winners. *LeChuck's Revenge* still looks great today, and the soundtrack remains a thing of beauty, thanks to the introduction of iMUSE which made its debut in this swashbuckling follow-up. The trio of Ron, Tim and Dave also returned, although only the latter two are credited with writing the hilarious script. There are far more references to Pirates Of The Caribbean this time around too, as well as a controversial and ambiguous ending which implies the game took place in a theme park. Despite the well-crafted story, cleverly designed puzzles and gorgeous visuals, LucasArts' sequel didn't find the same commercial success as its predecessor. Thankfully, the story wasn't over for Guybrush.



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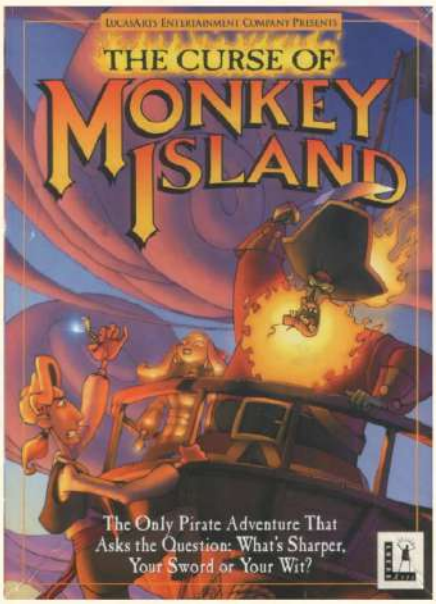

LucasArts Entertainment Company Presents
THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND
The Only Pirate Adventure That Asks the Question: What's Sharper, Your Sword or Your Wit?

The Curse Of Monkey Island

RELEASED: 1997

***Curse* could have been a disaster, as two thirds of the original core team were no longer at LucasArts, and the remaining member, Tim Schafer, was busy working on other projects.** Larry Ahern and Jonathan Ackley were tasked with keeping LucasArts' nautical franchise afloat and they did a tremendous job, even if it doesn't hit the heights of *LeChuck's Revenge*. It's the last game in the series to use the SCUMM engine and it looks incredible, thanks to a distinctive aesthetic that makes it appear like a cartoon that's come to life. That cartoony feel is further enhanced by the excellent voice acting, particularly from long-time *Monkey Island* fan Dominic Armato, who voices Guybrush. Larry and Jonathan made a great stab at continuing the franchise after the ambiguous ending for *LeChuck's Revenge*, and they also implemented some truly tremendous puzzles. *Curse* is also a game that's well-regarded by the original creators of the franchise, something that can't really be said about the next title we're going to look at...

•Then who keeps up the law and maintains order?
•Then who eats the donuts and roughs-up the transients?
•Please! Not in my new coat!
•OK, put me down now and I won't have to hurt you.

» [PC] Largo is a bully who robs Guybrush of all his riches at the start of *LeChuck's Revenge*. It's up to you to deal out his comeuppance.

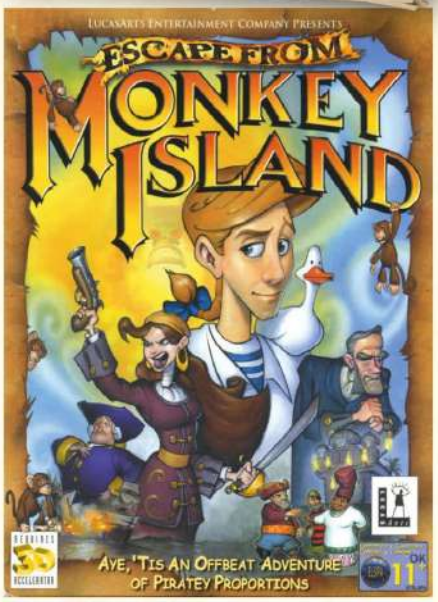
» [PC] *The Curse Of Monkey Island* is considered a winner purely for the inclusion of Murray The Demonic Talking Skull, who pops up throughout Guybrush's adventure.

"I THINK THE GAME FEELS WELCOMING TO PEOPLE. AND IT'S FUNNY! IT DOESN'T TAKE ITSELF TOO SERIOUSLY"

Tim Schafer

"MONKEY ISLAND TAPPED STRAIGHT INTO THE FUNDAMENTAL ACTIVITY OF HUMAN STORYTELLING. IT WAS A MODEL OF HUMAN EXISTENCE IN A WEIRD WAY"

Mark Ferrari


LucasArts Entertainment Company Presents
Escape From Monkey Island
Aye, 'Tis An Offbeat Adventure Of Piratey Proportions
11+

Escape From Monkey Island

RELEASED: 2000

It's always difficult when a videogame franchise moves over to 3D, and it was no different for *Escape From Monkey Island*, which was designed by Sean Clark and Michael Stemmle, who had previously directed *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. While it's certainly not a poor adventure, it's arguably the weakest game in the series and it's the last game in the franchise made by LucasArts. In fact, it would be the company's last adventure game, as poor sales for both *Escape* and *Grim Fandango* convinced the developer to leave the genre behind. While *Escape* is a more satirical take on the series and is certainly very amusing in places, clunky controls, insanely tough conundrums and a new type of rock-paper-scissors-based combat system called Monkey Kombat mean it feels quite a departure from the earlier games in many ways. Sean and Michael's decision to rewrite much of the fiction from the first game also didn't sit well with fans.

Tales Of Monkey Island

RELEASED: 2009

After nearly a decade in the wilderness the stars aligned for a brand-new *Monkey Island* adventure and it currently serves as a fitting end to the beloved series. *Tales* remains the only game in the franchise to not be developed by LucasArts, but as new developer Telltale Games featured many ex-LucasArts staff, it manages to retain all the familiar elements that fans of the series love. That familiarity is partly due to the return of artist Steve Purcell and Dave Grossman, who helped design the game, but they're joined by numerous *Monkey Island* veterans, including Mike Stemmle, musician Michael Land and Chuck Jordan. Even Ron Gilbert returned for brainstorming sessions and only Tim Schafer was unable to contribute. Telltale itself was no stranger to creating contemporary adventure games, having helped revive interest in the genre with the episodic adventure *Bone: Out From Boneville*. Nor was it a stranger to working with LucasArts games, as it had successfully released a new *Sam & Max* game in 2006.

Originally released for PC and Nintendo's Wii, *Tales'* engaging story is spread out across five episodes and sees the return of Guybrush Threepwood (voiced as usual by Dominic Armato) as well as Elaine and LeChuck, who kidnaps Guybrush's better half during the game's opening scenes. *Tales* features plenty of great puzzles and story beats as each episode unfolds, it introduces an array of entertaining new characters (as well as plenty of old friends) and it's a huge step up mechanically over the disappointing *Escape*. While it's unclear if Disney will ever resurrect the series, *Tales* is a more than enjoyable shanty to sail off into the sunset with. ✱

Monkey Magic

JOSH FAIRHURST REGALES A TALE OF LIMITED RUN GAMES' INCOMING MONKEY ISLAND ANTHOLOGY

What is it you love about the original *Monkey Island*?
The game has charm and humour that are second to none. A lot of games try to be funny, but *Monkey Island* is genuinely funny in a way that sticks with you like no other.

Why did you re-release the Sega CD version of the game?
I'm a big Sega CD fan, and in the US we got a bunch of early games in these very, very flimsy cardboard boxes. If you look at them wrong, they crumple. *Monkey Island* was one of those games that got the cardboard box treatment and I really, really, wanted to give this game a proper jewel case in line with later Sega CD games. We had also done a few retro *Star Wars* re-releases with Lucasfilm for consoles, so it made sense to do a console *Monkey Island* game to follow up on those successes.

How did your new *Monkey Island Anthology* come about?
We were originally looking at doing boxed re-releases for each of the PC *Monkey Island* games, but we felt like we could create a more exciting package by taking all four games and bundling them together with fun collectibles and a book that contains interviews and behind-the-scenes material that's never been seen before. We'd love to include *Tales Of Monkey Island*, but LucasArts doesn't control the rights to that one.

Are you doing any additional work to the games at all?
These will just be the originals, but we do hope to try and include a few different versions of each game, but it remains to be seen if we'll be able to do this or how many versions we'll be able to include of any particular title.

Will the set come out on systems beyond the PC?
No, unfortunately – just PC.

***Escape* and *Tales* don't seem to be included, why is this?**
Escape From Monkey Island is actually included – the mock-up we showed at our LRG3 showcase actually didn't have the fully correct lineup! We are working to try and include *Tales Of Monkey Island*, but that is controlled by Telltale and it's something that will take time to work out (and may not happen).

Why do you think the *Monkey Island* series remains so popular with fans?
As with many other LucasArts games, the series has such well-defined characters who stick with you well after you have left their world. These characters become a part of you and inhabit you in a way where it is hard to forget them. I think how likeable and relatable the game and characters are is why it has had such a long-lasting legacy and has generated such a passionate fanbase.

■ **The *Monkey Island Anthology* is due for release at the end of October. Go to limitedrungames.com for more information.**

» Limited Run Games specialises in elaborate special editions, and this one sold out incredibly fast.

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THE MAKING OF karate

Few calling cards were as impressive as Jordan Mechner's first videogame. Here, the acclaimed developer reveals how a love of animation and the Apple II led him to a lifelong career

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES & DARRAN JONES

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** JORDAN MECHNER
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **PLATFORM:** APPLE II
- **GENRE:** FIGHTING

"Dear Mr Mechner," began the typed letter with the heading 'Greetings Earthling' in a futuristic font. It was addressed to one Jordan Mechner in California, care of Brøderbund Software. "I am writing because I have played your game *Karateka*," it stated. "I am writing because you need to be congratulated on this game."

Gushing about the graphics, the shadows "and all", the writer enthused about the "tremendous job", which he believed "defined the state of the art for future Apple games". The writer, John Romero, was so taken by the game and its stunning visual effects that he tried to guess the techniques Jordan used.

John was in awe of Jordan, and he admitted he drew great inspiration from *Karateka*. Two years later, aged 19, he started work at Origin Systems and two years after that he was having a major hand in producing games such as *Doom* and *Quake*. But we refer to that letter of 1985 for a reason: *Karateka* was a landmark game, and a title that was so innovative that developers in their formative years wanted to learn from it. "Disciple of the Great Jordan and worshipper of the Magnificent Mechner," John Romero signed off. He would not have been the only one to be so inspired.

Jordan grew up with a love of animation. As a child, he would write stories, draw them and bring them to life on Super 8 film. He would have continued to do just that had he not become involved with an initiative run by IBM called Explorers, in which the computing giant would invite children to use its computer terminals after school. It was on these machines that he began to program in BASIC and APL.

By the time he was 14, his fascination had turned to obsession. His head was turned following weeks and months of playing on his friend's Apple II, realising he could make games that were similar to animated movies, helped along by the graphical prowess of the machine. He saved up and bought his own.

"I loved the Apple II," he enthuses. "I really enjoyed programming on it. I took it to college with me and I spent most of my freshman year programming a game called *Deathbounce*.

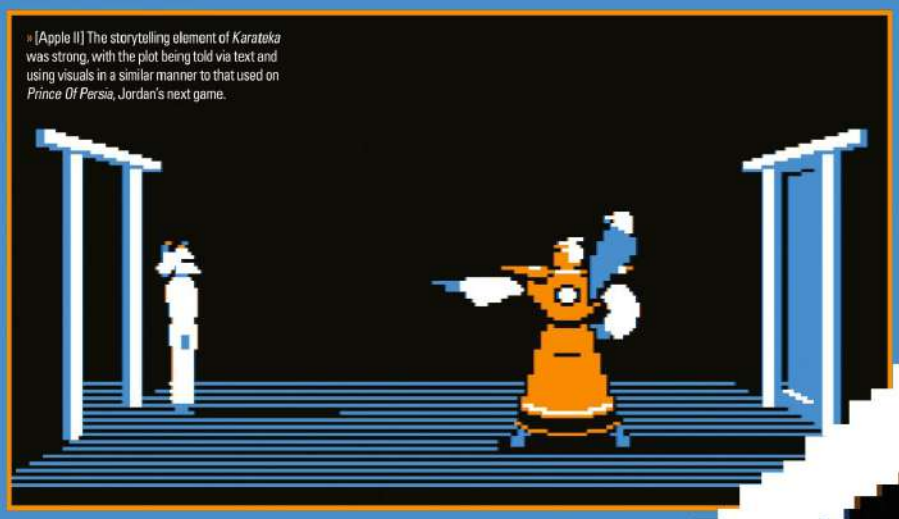
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PRINCE OF PERSIA
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993

THE LAST EXPRESS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1997

[Apple II] The beat-'em-up elements of *Karateka* require much button-bashing, but defeating a foe is satisfying.



» [Apple II] The storytelling element of *Karateka* was strong, with the plot being told via text and using visuals in a similar manner to that used on *Prince Of Persia*, Jordan's next game.

It was a shoot-'em-up, which I tried to get Brøderbund interested in taking on because I loved that publisher so much. They didn't want it, and I was crushed."

But far from becoming disillusioned and giving up, he was rather taken by a new Brøderbund game called *Choplifter*, which he says blew him away. "It had the smoothest, most sophisticated animation I'd ever seen on an Apple II," he says. And he vowed at that point to make a cinematic game. The seeds of *Karateka* – the name of which means a practitioner of karate – were sown.

From an early stage, Jordan wanted the new game to draw on the silent film techniques that he had learned about in his history of cinema classes. The visuals of the game were important to him and he wanted people to stop in their tracks and be amazed by the graphics and the animation. He drew on aspects of his life that interested him at the time.

"I took a lot of inspiration from sources other than games," he says. "My favourite Kurosawa film, *Seven Samurai*, was one, and I also liked the artist Hokusai and his Japanese woodblock prints. I was intrigued by the American film director DW Griffith, and early silent movies. I liked how they used cross-cutting to create suspense. I was also very much into Bruce Lee movies, Disney animation and the karate classes I was taking over the summer. All of that got thrown into the mix."

Jordan set his game in feudal Japan and the plot was simple and, with hindsight, rather typical and cliched – telling of an evil warlord called Akuma kidnapping your girlfriend, Mariko, prompting you to fight his minions to rescue her from his fortress. Indeed, it was a story that would be familiar to those who played Jordan's next game, *Prince Of Persia*.

And yet, in this instance, the plot was secondary to the animation, although Jordan wanted his game to have a sense of purpose, with the karate gameplay moving the story along. "The idea is that you are fighting to rescue the woman you love from a kidnapper. It's not continued fighting for the sake of

JORDAN MECHNER
PROGRAMMER OF KARATEKA AND PRINCE OF PERSIA

KARATEKA REIMAGINED

Although it didn't have the same pull as *Prince Of Persia*, there was more than enough interest in *Karateka* for Jordan to create a brand-new high definition remake, which was released in late 2012.

Overseen by Jordan and developed by Liquid Entertainment, *Karateka* at first appears to have the same structure as the original, but there are a number of important differences. Mariko still needs saving, but this time two other suitors step up to the challenge if her original beau dies: A quiet, unassuming monk and a large hulking behemoth known as the brute. All three suitors have varying energy bars, which effectively relate to *Karateka*'s difficulty and completing the game with each will result in a completely different ending.

Combat has been greatly updated and while it shares many similarities with the ebb and flow of the Apple II original, audio cues now play a more crucial role, letting you successfully block incoming attacks before unleashing your own. It's solid, but it's a shame that there's no real variety between the three playable characters as it greatly stunts the game's longevity.

The final thing worth mentioning is *Karateka*'s distinctive aesthetic, along with the stylistic cel-shaded graphics and lovely animation have held up well, with some sections of your journey looking absolutely sumptuous. Jordan's high-definition remake may not have had the same impact as the original, but it remains an interesting counterpoint to the 1984 classic.

[Apple II] The lush graphics of *Karateka* were a major draw for many gamers.

it," he says. It was Jordan's aim to produce lifelike characters in a fighting game that was more cinematic than any that had gone before it that caught most attention, however. He aimed to introduce tracking shots and cross-cutting, as well as a method of animation that had not been tried in gaming before called rotoscoping, in which filmed footage is traced over frame by frame and turned into realistic animation.

Whereas the original idea had been to draw the frames by hand, Jordan decided it looked too much like 'programmer animation'. "It was not nearly good enough for what I was dreaming of," he admits. "A huge leap forward came when I decided to try rotoscoping, and the game was starting to evolve quite a lot from its original conception."

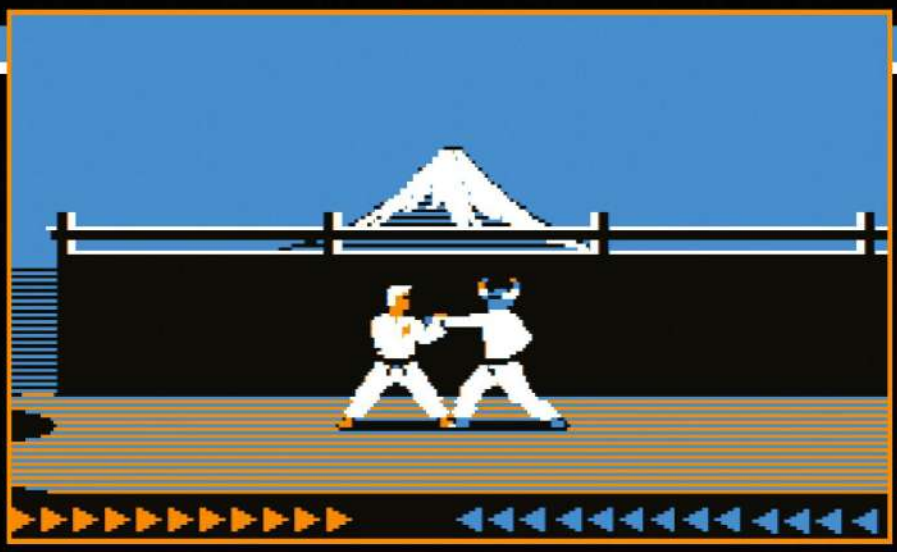
The player had to control their own martial arts in a battle against the enemy. Kicking and punching through the fodder, it was possible to determine the height of the blows. Jordan wanted characters to look as if they were real, with every punch and kick played out as it would in his classes. This, he believed, would capture his love of animation.

"I had a great book by two early Disney animators and I knew they'd used rotoscoping as an animation aid," he says. "I used Super 8 film to shoot my mom's karate teacher doing punches and kicks, then traced the outlines into the computer. Despite the primitive technology, it worked well. Later, I used a more refined version in *Prince Of Persia*, and then again in *The Last Express*."

As well as the rotoscoping, he was keen to infuse *Karateka* with as much Japanese influence as possible. 'Akuma' means 'devil', and the Akuma Castle is inspired by the Himeji Castle near Kyoto, Japan. This was one of the very first martial arts games – coming three years before *Street Fighter* and beating *Kung Fu Master* and *Karate Champ* by a few months – and Jordan was ensuring it was nothing if not faithful.

Since the joysticks of the time had few buttons, the moves of *Karateka* were not complex in the slightest, but it fitted his desire of being a pick-up-and-play kind of game. But despite trying to keep things relatively simple, it was still a major challenge for Jordan. He had to produce everything from scratch on his Apple II, programming in machine code. Drawing items on-screen was initially a laborious process in which he had to code the tools to allow him to create freely, and it took him many months.

Jordan's main difficulty was keeping his motivation high. He was 18, at college, and he had to balance work with play as well as the game. "It was the biggest project of any kind I'd taken on in my whole life," he says. "It kept on



growing as I added new ideas and made it more ambitious. The challenge was to keep coming back to it. To not stop. But I was in college so obviously there were interruptions."

The difficult part was that he produced the game largely on his own, with friends Gene Portwood and Lauren Elliot helping with additional graphics and animation. His father, who became an accomplished classical concert pianist by the age of 19 and worked as a research psychologist, composed the music, and Jordan spent ages working out how to take that score and translate it from reams of handwritten sheet music into assembly machine code.

But, after two-and-a-half years, it was ready. Six months earlier, he had sent it on a 5.25-inch floppy disk to Brøderbund and EA. He was determined the game would not fail as his previous one had, so he ensured they only saw it when it was pretty much done.

"Brøderbund called back and said they wanted to publish it," he recalls. "They flew me out to California for the summer to make changes, which was primarily expanding the game. That summer was my introduction to working at a professional game studio. It was a huge thrill, meeting my heroes – people like Dan Gorlin, who'd made *Choplifter* – and being accepted as a colleague, not just a kid who'd been fiddling with a computer. It was what I'd been dreaming of since age 14."

Jordan's dream became a reality and *Karateka* was released in 1984, with a NES port coming in the same year. It was later ported to a host of other systems, from the Amstrad CPC and Atari 800 to the Commodore 64 and DOS PCs two years later, "The PC version seemed okay, except for overall sluggishness, frequent disk accesses, and a few minor graphics glitches.

[Apple II] Jordan attempted to build suspense by introducing the characters via cutscenes, rushing towards our hero.

Then I booted up the Apple version to compare and it was so smooth it made me want to cry," Jordan recalls. Interestingly, in an 'Ask Me Anything' session on Reddit in 2013, Jordan revealed that he felt Robert Cook's conversions for the C64 and Atari 400/800 were the best ports, revealing they "actually improved on the Apple II in certain ways, especially sound and music. My dad reorchestrated the entire score to take advantage of the better sound, and Robert tore his hair out trying to get it all to play correctly". The success of *Karateka* was such that in April 1985, it was ranked as the bestselling game in America by *Billboard* magazine, a tremendous achievement for such a young programmer. In 1988, an Atari ST version was released, while the Game Boy received a rather disappointing version called *Master Karateka* in December 1989. Thankfully, that particular version never made it west. Amazingly, *Karateka* was even released in 1990 for the humble ZX Spectrum in Spain. More than 500,000 units of *Karateka* were sold, including 250,000 units in its first month of release in Japan. Jordan left Yale with a BA in psychology and decided to pursue programming. "It was a miracle I ever graduated," he concludes. But with *Prince Of Persia* and *The Last Express* still to come, the gaming world was glad he stuck with it. ★

"IT WAS THE BIGGEST PROJECT OF ANY KIND I'D TAKEN ON IN MY WHOLE LIFE"

JORDAN MECHNER

Darkwing Duck

DOES WHAT IT SAYS ON THE TIN

» NES » 1992 » Capcom

Do you ever find that one small, singular thing can make the biggest difference to how much you enjoy a game? It's a surprisingly common occurrence. I have friends who can't tolerate the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* unless it's one of the versions where the spin-dash has been added. For others, English voice acting – or the lack of it – can be a deal breaker. Until recently, I thought that my biggest example was the preference I have for *Tetris* games featuring a 'hard drop' function when you press up on the d-pad, but digging out my NES during the production of our last issue actually highlighted something much more deeply felt.

I'd not played *Darkwing Duck* in a while, but it's the kind of game where you know what you're getting. It's one of Capcom's licensed Disney games, in the same sort of fashion as *DuckTales* and *Chip 'N Dale*, and they were always good value. What's more, it was a game produced by Tokuro Fujiwara, a prolific game designer who served as the main producer for the *Mega Man* series for a good while, and you can definitely see the influences. Darkwing Duck really feels a lot like the Blue Bomber in many ways, from the rhythm in which he fires his weapon to the small forward nudge he makes when you tap the d-pad. Alternate weapons are incredibly useful in navigating the game area, although they're regular pick-ups rather than rewards for beating bosses. The game even has a nonlinear structure that allows you to pick your stages.

I couldn't work out why I was enjoying it more than I usually do the *Mega Man* games, until it hit me – or rather, something didn't hit me. As an enemy attack came in, I instinctively pressed down and took advantage of the fact that *Darkwing Duck* can, well, duck. I'm so used to crouching being part of platform-shooters that I resent its absence when it's not there. I know *Mega Man* doesn't traditionally let you do it, but it still feels like a 'knock 10% off the review score' bugbear. Does that seem extreme? ✱

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

COMMODORE 64 GAMES

Collecting every game ever made for everyone's favourite breadbin isn't a realistic possibility, so we've concentrated on some of the most beloved games on the system – as well as those with some interesting curiosity value, of course

Words by Nick Thorpe

NINJA STAR

THE LAST NINJA

DEVELOPER:	SYSTEM 3
RELEASE:	1987

Armakuni's first outing is still one of the Commodore 64's most fondly remembered games, and rightly so. It featured satisfying combat and plenty of secrets, of course, but let's not kid ourselves – the gorgeous presentation was a huge reason why we loved it. You could see the attention that had gone into the lavish details of every screen, your character moved smoothly and the isometric perspective gave that sense of depth that made things feel just a little more real. Plus, it wasn't converted to Sir Clive's baby, so it was great for making your Speccy-owning mates jealous.

The Last Ninja is a great illustration of one of the core features of the Commodore 64 market. As a popular game that always has demand, the tape version is a little pricier than some of the other games out there, but you can still get it for less than a tenth of the price of the disk version, which we've seen go for as much as £150. We're not sure we'd pay that much just to cut down on the multiloads.

» [C64] Do you have the skilled movements necessary to negotiate the stepping stones across the river?

» [C64] Armakuni is supposed to be an ultra-tough combat machine, but we're getting beaten up. Whoops!

COMPLETE THE TRILOGY

The continuing adventures of Armakuni

THE LAST NINJA 2

After defeating Kunitoki in the first game, Armakuni suddenly finds himself transported to New York City and must try to resolve this mysterious turn of events. The tape version will set you back a minimum of £15 for the Hit Squad release, but if you can find the big box version, complete with shuriken and mask, you'll pay much more – and if you find the disk version, add even more. To save some money, look for the *100% Dynamite* compilation.

THE LAST NINJA 3

The final entry in the series looks amazing, but fans of the first two games are often split on the fantasy setting and enemies, as well as the revamped combat and some of the stage design choices. This is the most expensive game in the series – a complete copy of the cassette version will set you back at least £30 and potentially as much as £60 depending on condition, while the disk version recently sold for £150.

EGGCELLENT VALUE

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

EXPECT TO PAY £1+ CASSETTE

DEVELOPER: THE OLIVER TWINS
RELEASE: 1989

Gaming's most popular ovoid explorer was a big deal in the late Eighties, with Codemasters shifting tens of thousands of copies of his arcade adventures, and many players regard *Fantasy World Dizzy* as his finest outing. Dizzy's third adventure was the last to be designed solely by Philip and Andrew Oliver, and it introduced the rest of the Yolkfolk, including Dizzy's love interest Daisy and the self-styled cool guy Denzil.

Fortunately, supply of this particular cassette is adequately matched to demand these days, meaning that it can go for very little cash – you should never really pay more than £5, and if you're patient you can get it super cheap. The same goes for many of the other games in the *Dizzy* series, too, so this is a great place to look if you're new to the Commodore 64.

» [C64] The colourful, detailed border is a nice extra for C64 owners, given the otherwise functional graphics.

» [C64] As normal, red herrings like the bottle of whisky on this screen must be avoided.

HEAVY HITTER

NARC

EXPECT TO PAY £2.50+ TAPE

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ DISK

DEVELOPER: THE SALES CURVE
RELEASE: 1990

As one of the major purveyors of licensed software in the 8-bit era, it's no surprise that Ocean is represented with an arcade conversion here. Truth be told, it's not a top-tier game for your C64 by any stretch of the imagination – while there's a reasonable attempt made to bring the run-and-gun action home, the loss of digitised graphics robs the game of its excessive sense of violence. This game illustrates the importance of certain labels. The original Ocean release is super cheap, but the budget Hit Squad release is hard to come by. We've seen this version go for £75 and way up as high as £140, with demand driven by players attempting to collect the complete Hit Squad range. If you have this, you could be sitting on a pile of cash.

» [C64] Lots of running, lots of gunning, but not quite so much fun as the arcade version.

» [C64] Who knew that a budget label game could get as expensive as the Hit Squad version of *NARC*?

CARTRIDGE CLASSIC

WIZARD OF WOR

EXPECT TO PAY £38+ CARTRIDGE

DEVELOPER: JEFF BRUETTE
RELEASE: 1983

If you're not already a committed Commodore 64 fan, we'd understand if you didn't know that the computer supported cartridges. Tapes and disks were considerably cheaper to produce, allowing for bigger games at lower prices, and the attempt to revive the cartridge format with the C64 Games System was a bust. You shouldn't ignore the system's cartridge games, though, and Commodore's conversion of Midway's 1980 arcade game is reason enough to take notice. This maze shooter allows two players to take on all manner of fearsome foes simultaneously, before being confronted by the titular big baddie. While the game won't win any awards for graphical achievement, the arcade action is wonderfully responsive, frequently frantic and guaranteed to cause arguments when friendly fire incidents occur. Plus, if you grab the Magic Voice module, the Wizard Of Wor himself will taunt you as you play, which is awesome.

» [C64] Shooting the bad guys in *Wizard Of Wor* gets pretty tense, especially when they start shooting back.

MAGIC VOICE

The peripheral that lets you hear the words of the wizard

This voice synthesis module was one of the earliest official peripherals for the Commodore 64, and offers a basic vocabulary of 235 common words designed to enhance programs. The Magic Voice plugs into the computer's cartridge slot and can be accessed by any program running on the computer, with a pass-through slot to allow it to work with cartridge-based software. Programs could provide extra speech data allowing for more specialised vocabulary appropriate to the software, though this naturally ate up storage and had memory usage implications, especially in non-cartridge software. The unit wasn't well-supported with software, sold in low numbers and is now not too easy to find, so you'll likely need to set a good chunk of cash aside if you want to get the full *Wizard Of Wor* experience. Although we've seen a boxed one go for under £35 recently, you tend to see them sell for £90+ on eBay.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Ditch The Disks
If you're looking to make the most of your cash, you'll want to stick to cassettes – on the whole, prices for disk games are substantially higher than tapes.

Tested Is Best
Unfortunately, magnetic cassettes and disks are now reaching an age where failure is common. If you buy them untested these days, you're taking a gamble.

Fudged Budget
Don't assume that a budget release is still cheap today – with collectors trying to complete budget range sets, you might actually find that an original release is cheaper.

Consider Compilations
It's always worth seeing if one of your favourites got a compilation release, as the chances are the compilation could sell for less than the single game you're after.

GOING PLATINUM

THEY SOLD A MILLION

DEVELOPER:	VARIOUS
RELEASE:	1985

If you want to sell things, one really good way to do it is to tell people that those things are already very popular – "a million customers can't be wrong" isn't a true statement, but it sure is a persuasive one. Fortunately, this compilation actually delivers a quartet of well-regarded games that you'll be happy to have in your collection. As there's no C64 version of *Sabre Wulf*, which was a highlight of the Spectrum and Amstrad compilations, we get *The Staff Of Karnath* as a rather pleasant replacement Ultimate game. While the disk version is much more expensive than the two-tape package, as you'd expect, *They Sold A Million* is actually one of the cheaper disks about and a good starter for your collection.

EXPECT TO PAY
£22+
DISK

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?
The four games that comprise this compilation

Jet Set Willy
Matthew Smith's famous platformer is more famous as a Spectrum game, but the Commodore version retains many of its key characteristics. The large mansion, the toughness and the unfortunate game-breaking glitches are all present.

Daley Thompson's Decathlon
It's no surprise that combining a celebrity endorsement with memorable multi-sport action propelled this game to sales success. It's a good *Track & Field*-style game, and one of the most notorious joystick-wreckers in gaming history.

Beach Head
Bruce Carver's World War II shoot-'em-up is the oldest game on this compilation, and it has proven to have a timeless quality over the years. Busting your tanks through the defences to bring down the giant gun emplacement will always be fun.

The Staff Of Karnath
Take control of Sir Arthur Pendragon on a quest to destroy the titular artefact. Though it was considered slightly underwhelming in the Eighties due to Ultimate's reputation, this arcade adventure has found an appreciative audience in the years since.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

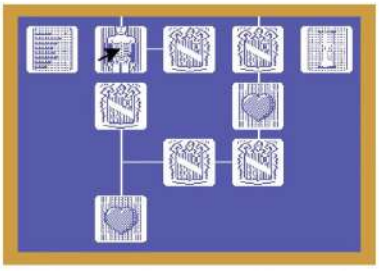
ALTER EGO

EXPECT TO PAY
£100+
MALE DISK

EXPECT TO PAY
£120+
FEMALE DISK

DEVELOPER:	ACTIVISION
RELEASE:	1986

Peter J Favaro's look into the human experience is one of the most innovative games of the Eighties, serving as a formative step in the life simulation genre. While the likes of *Little Computer People* and *The Sims* abstract the experience with an on-screen character, *Alter Ego* puts you firmly in the driving seat, giving you a rare chance to experience such a detailed alternative existence, capable of delivering both dizzying highs and disturbing lows. Unfortunately, as a highly renowned disk-only game, the prices on this one are way higher than for many C64 games, and that's worsened by the fact that there are distinct versions for male and female experiences. While we've seen the male version go for less than £100 in untested condition, the female version is less common and will cost you the big bucks.



» [C64] Each icon on your life map represents a different kind of experience, from romantic encounters to health events.

GET WITH THE TRENZ

TURRICAN

EXPECT TO PAY
£9+
TAPE

DEVELOPER:	RAINBOW ARTS
RELEASE:	1990

If you're a fan of either the C64 or action-packed run-and-gun games in general, you'll surely be familiar with *Turrican*. Designed and programmed by Manfred Trenz, the game offers tight blasting action in stages that are designed with the avid explorer in mind – as well as the rather unique 'lightning whip' weapon – all of which give a different feel from the majority of arcade-inspired entries in the genre. As a popular game from relatively late in the computer's commercial heyday, the game goes for a bit more than the average in-demand C64 game, and interestingly the original game is actually a bit more expensive than the sequel. The recently announced compilations for modern consoles don't include the 8-bit versions, so they will potentially increase interest without actually satisfying it. You may want to keep an eye on the price of this one as a result.

» [C64] *Turrican* remains unusual for its genre, thanks to its less linear levels that encourage exploration.

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

CALIFORNIA GAMES

DEVELOPER:	EPYX
RELEASED:	1987

EXPECT TO PAY
£3+ (TAPE), **£17+** (DISK)

BATMAN: THE MOVIE

DEVELOPER:	OCEAN
RELEASED:	1989

EXPECT TO PAY
£1.50+ (TAPE), **£17+** (DISK), **£50+** (CART)

RAINBOW ISLANDS

DEVELOPER:	GRAFTGOLD
RELEASED:	1987

EXPECT TO PAY
£3+ (TAPE), **£30+** (DISK)

ARMALYTE

DEVELOPER:	CYBERDYNE SYSTEMS
RELEASED:	1988

EXPECT TO PAY
£8.50+ (TAPE), **£40+** (DISK)

ULTIMA IV: QUEST OF THE AVATAR

DEVELOPER:	ORIGIN SYSTEMS
RELEASED:	1985

EXPECT TO PAY
£50+ (DISK)

HAVE A BLAST

WASTELAND

EXPECT TO PAY £65+ DISK

DEVELOPER: INTERPLAY
RELEASE: 1988

This post-apocalyptic RPG is one of the elite Commodore 64 games. Few games of the time offered such scope for creative puzzle-solving, nor such an engrossing atmosphere – one undoubtedly enhanced by the dying days of the Cold War – but that quality comes at a price. With no tape version you're left competing for the disk edition, and while incomplete copies are a rare sight, you'll want to check that both disks and all of the instructional paperwork are present inside that gorgeous gatefold cover. Additionally, this game serves as both the direct predecessor to the modern *Wasteland* sequels and the inspiration for the *Fallout* series. That kind of ongoing attention usually drives demand and this proves to be the case with *Wasteland*, so don't expect to bag this one on the cheap.

» [C64] *Wasteland* has been a massively influential RPG, particularly for its spiritual successor *Fallout*.

DOWN AND DIRTY

KIKSTART 2

EXPECT TO PAY £1+ TAPE

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ DISK

DEVELOPER: MR CHIP SOFTWARE
RELEASE: 1987

There's always space for a good competitive two-player game in your collection, and this budget biking game fits the bill nicely. The all-terrain action sees you and a friend trying to negotiate obstacle courses on dirt bikes, with narrow rails, ramps and jumps to contend with. It's one of the early examples of the kind of game design that would make the *Trials* series such a big hit on modern consoles, and the course creation package built into the game means that you can extend the fun for as long as your imagination can sustain it. Better yet, it's cheap – you can pick up the tape version for next to nothing, and even the comparatively scarce disk version doesn't attract too much attention. Go have some good, muddy fun.

» [C64] You'll need to be going at top speed to have a chance of clearing this river jump.

NO COPIED TAPES HERE

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

EXPECT TO PAY £13.50+ TAPE

DEVELOPER: MICROPROSE
RELEASE: 1987

Very few game designers have earned the right to use their own name as a brand, but playing *Pirates!* for the C64 will surely convince you that Sid Meier deserves that privilege. The game allows you to chart your own course on an epic swashbuckling adventure, but it's not all sword fights and treasure maps – you'll also have to plunder goods from your rivals, play politics with the colonial powers of the Caribbean and even try to find a wife, with the goal of a luxurious retirement. Both the cassette and disk versions come in big box form, and you'll want to make sure this is complete with both the manual and the huge paper map that were originally packaged with the game – it's quite hard to make any meaningful progress without them.

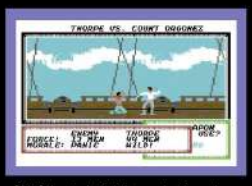
» [C64] The map is essential for navigating the Caribbean – make sure it's in your box when you buy the game.

EXPECT TO PAY £21+ DISK

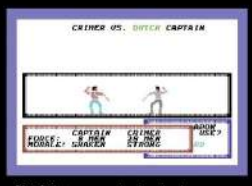
TAPE VS DISK

There's more to this one than the price bump

While many C64 games don't warrant a version comparison due to their similarity, *Pirates!* needs to be talked about in more detail. The cassette version is lacking quite a few of the features of the disk version, mostly in graphical terms – sword fights look incredibly basic and you'll face many more screens of plain text, with no illustrations to liven them up. *Pirates!* is also quite unusual amongst C64 games in that it is fairly expensive by tape standards and fairly cheap by disk standards, so the disk doesn't command nearly as much of a price premium compared to many of the games we've covered here. As a result, we'd recommend picking up the disk version over the tape if you're fortunate enough to have the choice.



» [C64] Here's the full-fat combat from the disk version, with a nice ship backdrop for your fight.



» [C64] The tape version is miles less impressive, as you can see here. We prefer the other version, really.

POSTER PASTER

DEVELOPER: TASKSET
RELEASED: 1984
EXPECT TO PAY
£3+ (TAPE), **£300+** (DISK)

BURGER TIME

DEVELOPER: INTERCEPTOR MICROS
RELEASED: 1984
EXPECT TO PAY
£10+ (TAPE), **£125+** (DISK)

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS

DEVELOPER: JEFF MINTER
RELEASED: 1983
EXPECT TO PAY
£6+ (TAPE)

WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

DEVELOPER: MELBOURNE HOUSE
RELEASED: 1985
EXPECT TO PAY
£1+ (TAPE), **£100+** (DISK)

ROBOCOP

DEVELOPER: OCEAN
RELEASED: 1989
EXPECT TO PAY
£3.50+ (TAPE), **£13.50+** (DISK), **£50+** (CART)

Famicom Disk System

» **PLATFORM:** Famicom » **RELEASED:** 1986
» **COST:** ¥15,000 (LAUNCH), £45+ (TODAY, BOXED), £30+ (TODAY, UNBOXED)

While Nintendo has often been associated with ROM cartridges, it did have a problem with them in the mid-Eighties – they were prone to supply shortages and expensive to make, especially for larger games. The solution was the Famicom Disk System. Its 112KB floppy disks offered more storage space and a significant cost reduction, and players could even write new games to their disks at dedicated in-store kiosks for as little as ¥500. Though Nintendo abstained from producing any new games on cartridge for two years, other publishers, like Namco, didn't make the jump, and the new format was in decline by 1988 and finally discontinued in 1990.

The unit itself is designed to complement the Famicom's design, with a maroon and black colour scheme and a flat top designed to support the main system. A battery compartment enabled the system to be powered by six C batteries if an AC outlet was unavailable. The black RAM adaptor acts as the interface between the disk unit and the console, and contains 32KB RAM for disk caching and 8KB RAM for graphical data. The bright yellow disks, based on the QuickDisk format, featured recessed 'NINTENDO' lettering that acted as a physical copy protection measure – albeit an ineffective one, as Famicom Disk System piracy was rampant. ✱

Famicom Disk System fact

■ The jingle that plays when the Famicom Disk System starts up was later reused for the GameCube's internal operating system music – however, it was played at an unrecognisable slow speed.

ESSENTIAL GAME

SUPER MARIO BROS 2

There's a certain thrill to be had in playing a game that's deemed as being specifically 'not for *you*', and Nintendo decided that the sadistically difficult sequel to *Super Mario Bros* was not an appropriate follow-up for audiences outside of Japan. While that decision would eventually be reversed with the release of *Super Mario All-Stars* for the SNES, which included the game under the name *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, *Mario* completists will want the game in its original 8-bit form. That means you'll need the Famicom Disk System, because this game was never given a cartridge release.

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Pool of Radiance

Much like the tabletop experience itself, the creation of the first ever D&D computer game was a truly epic quest against amazing odds. We chat with some of the former key members of the team at SSI to learn just how they achieved such an impressive feat

WORDS BY BEN BURNS

» [PC] White balding head and beard combo? Training fighters? Yeah, this guy is certainly an ex-adventurer. He's only 32... the Forgotten Realms are a rough place.

You wouldn't think it today, but there was once a time when *D&D* was considered far too complex to fit on a disk or run on a computer. The concept of a Dungeon Master was just too much for any programmed AI. Even if someone could have wrangled a computer into running a game, things like dialogue with NPCs, maps, notes, and the many classes and spells were all just too much for the hardware of the Eighties. It's for this reason that we'll always be in awe of Strategic Simulations Inc's *Pool Of Radiance*. While it wasn't the first *D&D* game, it was the first to capture the *D&D* rules properly, paving the way for classics like *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*, not to mention introducing a swarm of gamers to the Forgotten Realms.

Speaking to Chuck Kroegel, director of that now-legendary game, it seems the first hurdle to making a *D&D* game was out-flexing EA. "We learnt that a few weeks before we showed up, an Electronic Arts representative had come to TSR [creator of *Dungeons & Dragons*] and greatly swayed the management towards granting them the licence," he explains. "When we visited, we brought about five people and four computers to show and demonstrate how we would approach the *D&D* licence. They chose SSI because of our obvious enthusiasm for *D&D*."

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC
- **DEVELOPER:** STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, APPLE II, PC, NES, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** ROLE-PLAYING GAME

It's difficult to imagine a world in which the behemoth that is EA was somehow beaten out by a company that specialises in strategy games, but the late Eighties were a totally different world to the one we inhabit. EA was the fresh-faced new guy on the scene. True to the company's title, its employees considered themselves artists, releasing their games in trendy record-style sleeves to exemplify their belief that this was, indeed, electronic art. SSI, however, had been churning out an average of six or seven games a year, consistently, since 1981, and its developers were widely regarded as experts in the arena of RPGs and complex war/combat simulations.

And really, this is what needs to be understood about why *D&D* was considered such a mountain to climb for PC games, and consequently why *Pool Of Radiance* was so impressive in its day. Simulating combat in a game wasn't uncommon at the time. There were simulators for air combat, medieval conquest, modern warfare – you name it, it existed. Furthermore, if it existed, it was likely that SSI had the best version of it out there. Story, on the other hand, was a serious challenge. Stories were resource-hungry. They required a lot of words, which in turn required a lot of disk space. There had been a few recent games that had managed it. Text-based adventures like *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* (1985) eschewed imagery in favour of an entertaining narrative, doing away with graphics altogether. Earlier graphical adventure titles, such as the *King's Quest* series, had impressive visuals for the time, and they certainly had a plot, but most of the story was printed on the box or in the manual.

Dungeons & Dragons, however, required both of these. *D&D* was always centred on a narrative, with a group of distinct adventurers going on some epic quest, meeting villains, chatting with tavern-talkers and haggling with blacksmiths. But *D&D* was also an extremely complex combat simulation, with a variety of classes, weapons, spells and an absolute trove of rules. To make a *D&D* videogame, you needed to be able to have the best of both worlds.

And that's exactly what SSI achieved. Firing up the game today, it's still amazing to see the kind of depth it retains, even after all these years. Character creation allows you to choose from six races and four classes, gives you a choice of gender, allows you to name your character, roll up their stats and then prompts you to customise the appearance of each one. Combat is a complex and nuanced tactical experience, accurately reproducing the need to manage everything from the positioning ▶

» [PC] The taverns of new Phlan can be just as dangerous as its monster-infested slums.

» [PC] Darin The Pious is a mere 22 years old. The life of a cleric must be brutal – all that healing and carrying the team must weigh heavy.

> "WE LEARNT THAT A FEW WEEKS BEFORE WE SHOWED UP, AN ELECTRONIC ARTS REPRESENTATIVE HAD COME TO TSR AND GREATLY SWAYED THE MANAGEMENT TOWARDS GRANTING THEM THE LICENCE"
> CHUCK KROEGEL

CONVERSION CAPERS A POOL OF POOL OF RADIANCES

NAME AC HP
DEAL WITH DOZENS OF DIFFERENT MONSTERS RIGHT IN THE 3D PITS. YOU CAN DECIDE TO FIGHT FROM HERE OR MOVE IN CLOSER FOR A BETTER LOOK.

COMMODORE 64

■ The Commodore 64 version is a truly incredible achievement. It runs smoothly, the graphics are impressive for the hardware, and it's a joy to play. The machine's SID chip is sadly underutilised though, with just the odd bleep to denote attacks and damage. It's still a must-have for any serious C64 collector, though.

APPLE II

■ While the high-resolution capabilities of the Apple II were no doubt impressive in its heyday, the unusual colour palette chosen for this version is positively headache-inducing. Text is chunky and difficult to read, and the buildings are often difficult to distinguish from one another.

PC

■ MS-DOS users often got the short end of the stick when it came to ports, but the PC posse will be pleasantly surprised to learn that their version of *Pool Of Radiance* is one of the best. The excellently drawn monsters, in particular, are a highlight. It is, however, sadly lacking in audio.

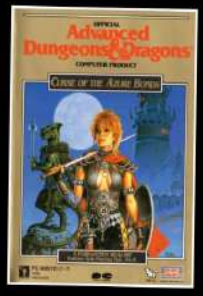
NES

■ Of all the ports, the NES version is the most unique. It maintains a cartoonish vibe throughout every element of its art style. It certainly looks better than most of its computer counterparts and has a full soundtrack to boot. Although it did have a decent chunk of extra development time, releasing in 1992.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

FURTHER FORAYS INTO THE FORGOTTEN REALMS

CURSE OF THE AZURE BONDS

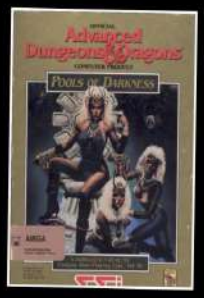


Pool Of Radiance was followed up in 1989 by this direct sequel. Players can even transfer their old characters over, although this would mean you'd miss out on the two new classes, ranger and paladin. *Curse Of The Azure Bonds* would go on to be almost as successful as its predecessor, selling just shy of 180,000 copies.

SECRET OF THE SILVER BLADES

Secret Of The Silver Blades is, once again, a direct sequel. This time, however, the world map is done away with in favour of a fully first-person experience. The (by this time somewhat exhausted) adventurers must see off a horde of monsters who have escaped a glacial prison, threatening the town of Verdigris.

POOLS OF DARKNESS



The final entry in the *Pool Of Radiance* series sees the adventurers returning to New Phlan, before being forced into a dimension-spanning adventure that will determine the fate of the entire world. It features vastly improved graphics when compared to the rest of the series, as well as some seriously tough monsters.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PANZER GENERAL
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1994

REALMS OF DARKNESS
SYSTEM: APPLE II, C64, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

SOUTHERN COMMAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1981

of your party members on the battle map, to the area of effect and chance to hit that your spells have. It's just as easy to wipe out your own party with a poorly placed sleep spell as it is to utterly turn the tide of battle by hitting a swathe of enemy orcs.

The mechanics, however, are just the tip of the iceberg. Upon starting the actual campaign, a local herald gives you an in-engine, three-dimensional, walking tour of New Phlan, the city in which *Pool Of Radiance* takes place. From this point, you're free to pretty much do whatever you like. The world is huge, encompassing the city itself, which contains a dozen distinct districts, as well as the surrounding wilderness and a sizable keep off the coast of the Bay Of Phlan. It truly is a beefy adventure which rivals anything that came afterwards, at least in terms of scale.

However, it isn't until you first enter a tavern or check the proclamations board that the charms of this game really begin to show. You'll

» [PC] Encamping is a requirement for healing, relearning spells and saving the game.

be prompted to open the manual and read 'tavern tale seven' or 'proclamation XII'. You'll then get a bit of hot gossip, overheard from some inebriated dockworker, or a haughty announcement, pinned to the board outside the town hall, about some poor mercenary band that has disappeared in the local cemetery. It's an absolutely genius way of saving that precious disk space, and really adds to the pulpy vibe which gives the 'Gold Box' games such an endearing charm.

SSI's founder and president, Joel Billings, attributes a large part of this genius to the game's lead programmer, Keith Brors. "He had tons of experience playing *D&D* and many other role-playing games, and experience designing and developing computer role-playing games with detailed tactical combat engines," he explains. Indeed, Keith started playing *D&D* back in 1977, during the hobby's salad days. Speaking to him, years later, it's immediately clear that he has a solid understanding of what makes a fun fantasy adventure. "The booklet was definitely a big innovation for *Pool Of Radiance*," he explains. "There usually wasn't anywhere near as much fluff in our books, but TSR wanted the game to have that epic, *D&D* campaign feel."

"YOU LITERALLY HAD 32KB TO WORK WITH. BUT A COMPILER WOULD HAVE MADE THE CODE FIVE OR TEN TIMES LARGER THAN EFFICIENTLY WRITTEN ASSEMBLY CODE WOULD EVER BE"
KEITH BRORS

In fact, it was Keith's love of pen-and-paper RPGs that scored him a job at SSI in the early Eighties. "Back in the old days you could just go into a company's office and demo a game, to see if you wanted to buy it," he explains. "I met a programmer there, Paul Murray, who was working away on some title, and I mentioned how much I loved RPGs, so they told me there was a job opening." It's

NAME AC HP
GORRIN 10 12
MERRIN 8 5
ELLARA 8 2
DARIN THE PIOUS 10 9
HEDRA 7 4
LORRIN 9 8
0,4 W 00:00
'BEYOND THIS GATE ARE THE MONSTER-RIDDEN AREAS OF THE OLD CITY WE ARE SLOWLY PREPARING FOR SETTLEMENT. THE COUNCIL OFFERS A GENEROUS REWARD TO THOSE WHO CLEAR AREAS OF MONSTERS.
PRESS <ENTER>/<RETURN> TO CONTINUE

» [PC] Your first bit of action in New Phlan will involve clearing out the slums.

unsurprising that, almost a decade later, Keith was chosen to head up the programming effort for *Pool Of Radiance*.

Creating a *D&D* adventure on late Eighties machines was no simple task. The hardware of the era would need to be squeezed for every drop of juice, and that's exactly what the team at SSI set about doing, going to extreme lengths to save space on the disk. They even hand-coded the entire thing in assembly language. "It was a challenge," explains Keith. "You literally had 32KB to work with. But a compiler would have made the code five or ten times larger than efficiently written assembly code would ever be."

Even more amazing, however, is the fact that SSI was able to port *Pool Of Radiance* to the Commodore 64. The much-loved microcomputer was, by 1988, beginning to show its age. The team got around this by coding the game specifically with the C64 in mind, and then writing a compiler that converted everything from the Apple II, which the title was being developed on, to the various other systems it was to be ported to, including the C64. In another show of extreme efficiency, this was done in a way that absolutely would not get past health and safety regulations in 2020. "We took an Apple II joystick and one from a C64, took them apart, and soldered them together. We then used them to pipe the code from the Apple to the Commodore, using the joystick as an interface. Today, with the existence of Bluetooth and wireless capabilities, you'd never have to even think of employing such crazy shenanigans to interface between two devices!"

» [PC] The team absolutely nailed the Eighties *Dungeons & Dragons* aesthetic with some of this game's art.

But it wasn't just efficient programming that made *Pool Of Radiance* (and the subsequent Gold Box series of titles that it spawned) such a compelling experience. "It really felt like you were playing *D&D*," Keith is quick to point out. "When you got into a tactical battle, moving your pieces around, throwing your spells at monsters, it felt authentic. When combined with the game's great story, it created an experience that has endured." And endure it has. With over a quarter of a million copies of the game sold in North America alone, it is, to this day, SSI's most successful title.

The Gold Box *D&D* series would grow to number 12 titles, all produced between 1988 and 1992. In a somewhat sad twist, it was actually the ingenuity of that first game which would eventually spell the end of SSI and its work on the *D&D* licence. By 1993, the ageing engine, which was designed to cater to the limitations of the C64, was becoming increasingly unattractive, resulting in declining sales, eventually leading to financial losses. In 1994 the company was sold to Mindscape, losing the *D&D* licence and ending any chance of further work with TSR. Still, the legacy of *Pool Of Radiance* and the Gold Box games lives on in the many great *D&D* games that followed. Without *Pool Of Radiance* there would certainly be no *Baldur's Gate*, *Icewind Dale*, or any of the modern isometric RPGs like *Pillars Of Eternity*. It truly was, and still is, a testament to what can be achieved with a little ingenuity and a lot of love for the hobby. ✱

» [PC] Violence isn't always the answer. Just like the tabletop game, you can try to parlay with enemies to avoid a scrap – and sometimes it works!

AN ADVENTURER'S GUIDE TO NEW PHLAN

HAVE A PLEASANT STAY

■ For all of your arms and armour needs, be sure to visit Generic Blacksmith #5 in the market area of New Phlan. He's famous for his quality of craftsmanship, as well as his somewhat eccentric penchant for piling all of your money on the floor and then blaming it on the game's interface.

■ Don't forget to check out the world-famous 'Small Man Of New Phlan'. What he lacks in stature he makes up for in lucrative quests and randomly generated loot. You'll find him in the now monster-riddled slums, where he wiles away the days, demanding to know why you're disturbing him.

■ Be sure to swing by the Proclamations Board and pick up a job or two. You haven't had the full Phlantastic experience until you've monetarily profited from the suffering of the fine folk of this fair city!

■ Unlike those Sword Coast wimps, we here in New Phlan encourage regular, strenuous exercise in the form of life-threatening brawls with ogres and goblins. Remember our unofficial slogan. "If it's smelly and green, it's okay to be mean!"

Silpheed

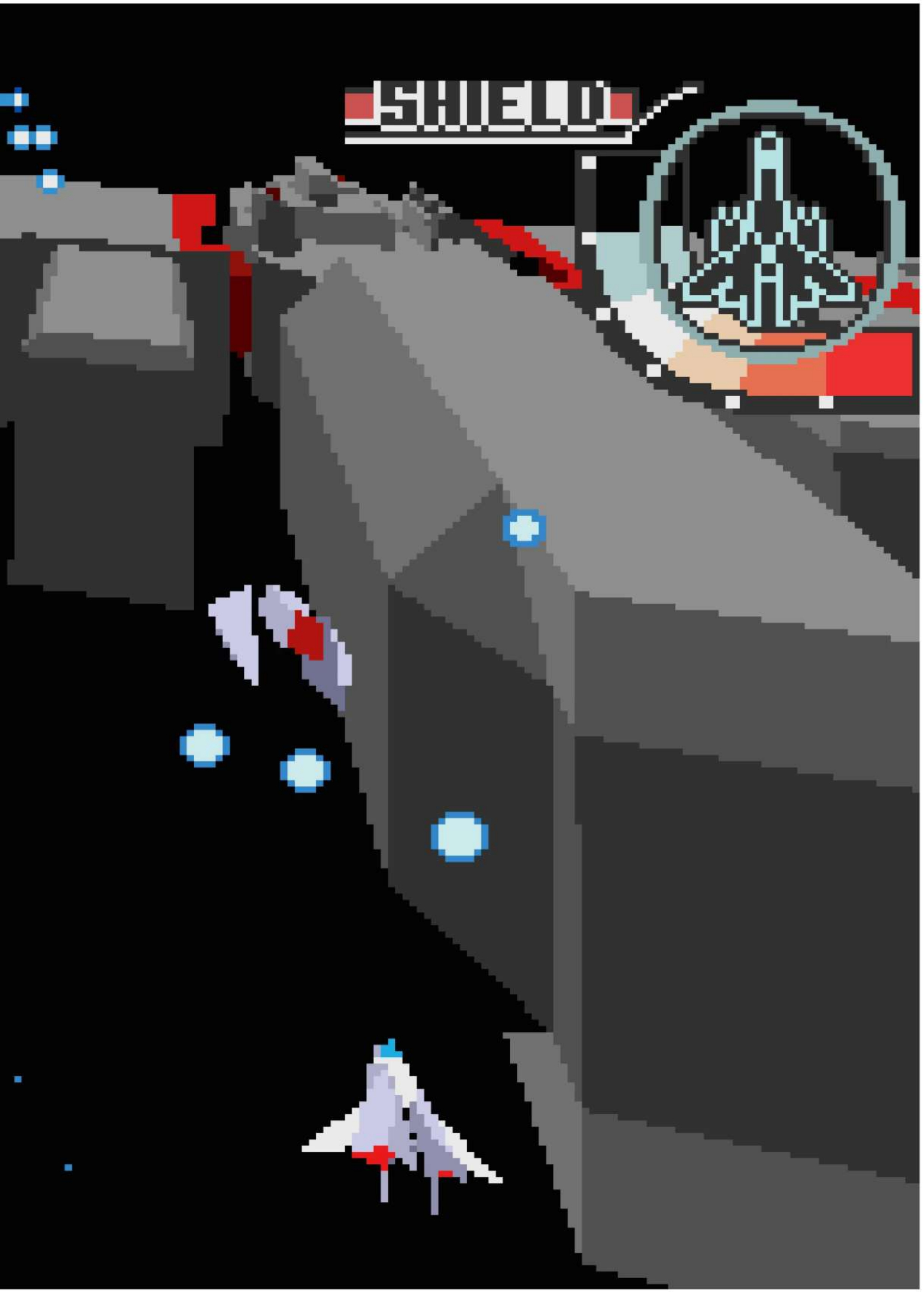
IS IT SIL-PHEED OR SILP-HEED?

» Mega-CD » 1993 » Game Arts

On occasion, both myself and Darran have told the story of how we first met at the Classic Games Expo UK in 2005. He was on *games™* at the time and selling off some Saturn games. I was 18, still doing my A Levels and turned down the opportunity to buy *Panzer Dragoon Saga* from him for £50 because that was my whole budget for the day. But recently, my mum asked what I *did* buy that day, and thankfully I had a photographic record. Some of it was tragic – in my defence, I'd never played the Mega Drive version of *Virtua Fighter 2* before. Other bits were pretty good, like the copies of *Sonic Jam* and *Virtua Cop 2* I'd bought from Darran, and *Silpheed* was definitely one of the good ones.

Issue 11 of *Sega Zone* devoted four pages of coverage to the Japanese version of *Silpheed*, and it was there that I first saw the game. I was convinced immediately that programmers had finally managed to make the Mega-CD into the technical revolution that Sega had promised us it would be – the grainy videos in *Night Trap* and *Sewer Shark* were sort of impressive, but this was proof that it could do amazing 3D graphics. Sod that simple-looking *'Gunstar Heroes'* thing that got 94% elsewhere in the mag, *Silpheed* was the future, and I wanted in.

Of course, I'd never actually seen *Silpheed* in action, so I couldn't have seen how the background action wasn't as smooth as the foreground, because ultimately the game was just doing what so many other Mega-CD games did – playing back FMV. That *Sega Zone* review even states that the game isn't truly 3D, but at that point I was a small child who could just see a game that looked like *Virtua Racing*, so the statement probably just confused me. By the time I bought it, I knew the deal and the attractive, enjoyable but non-revolutionary shooter didn't disappoint me. Plus, by the time of CGE:UK 2005 I'd learned how good *Gunstar Heroes* was, so I bought that, too – silver linings, and all that!


SHIELD

ULTIMATE GUIDE

Super Castlevania IV

Remasters are all the rage these days, but back in 1991 Konami released a sequel that had more than a whiff of familiarity to it. So join us as we embark on Simon's Belmont's greatest quest of all time

Words by Darran Jones

HANGING SKELETON

HARPY

DULLAHAN

FIRE EYE

Konami's *Castlevania* franchise has a reputation for strong atmosphere, but few games in the series come close to capturing the sheer dark majesty of *Super Castlevania IV* – confusingly, the eighth main game in the series on its release. Fittingly released in time for Halloween in Japan in 1991 and overseen by Masahiro Ueno (who was credited as Jun Furano), the eighth *Castlevania* game is a spectacular addition to the series, even if some fans felt it was something of a step back after experiencing *Dracula's Curse* on the NES.

It's a fair assessment to make, in retrospect, as mechanically Ueno's game would have certainly felt a little lacking to anyone that had experienced the branching stages, multiple endings and extra characters that all featured in Konami's third *Castlevania* NES adventure. This is partly because Ueno saw his game as something of a remake of the original NES classic he used to enjoy playing (albeit with a few additional quality-of-life additions), and also because Ueno and his small team began work on *Castlevania IV* while *Dracula's Curse* was still in development (you can read more in **Retro Gamer 119**). As a result, *Super Castlevania IV* is perhaps best described as a remix of the NES original, retelling the story of Simon Belmont's fight against Dracula, but adding new stages, bosses and greatly enhanced audio. Think of Ueno as a storyteller spinning a yarn to a group of entranced listeners around a campfire, embellishing the well-known tale with additional flourishes that no one in the crowd would have heard before.

This reimagining of the earlier *Castlevania* games – and Ueno played all of them while working on his 16-bit adventure – meant the series returned to its arcade-like origins and dropped the RPG elements that Konami had first introduced in *Castlevania II*. It also meant a more linear structure through each level, which again, was more in line with the exploration that featured in the first NES *Castlevania* game. It's worth remembering, though, that the Super Nintendo was a very capable console compared to the NES, and the added razzmatazz found in

MERMAN

ZOMBIE DOG

SKELETON SOLDIER

» [SNES] The atmosphere is immense. These candles spookily light up as you approach Dracula's resting place.

» [SNES] You've barely started your adventure and this creepy-looking mountain already suggests your journey isn't going to be easy.

the machine's 16-bit innards meant Ueno and his team were able to deliver an adventure that felt suitably different to those games that had come before it, even if there was a distinct whiff of familiarity to some of the locations.

Indeed, one of the most fulfilling aspects of *Super Castlevania IV* is just how epic Simon's quest still feels. While it retains the 2D level structure of every *Castlevania* before it, there's a staggering amount of variety to the game's environments, a diversity that's further enhanced by the game's incredible score. Before you've even reached the drawbridge that leads into Dracula's castle, you'll have traversed a haunted stable, cautiously made your way through an overgrown graveyard, climbed up the slippery stone remnants of an abandoned waterfall, fought through a gigantic cavern and, in one of the game's most stunning setpieces,

» [SNES] Even sub-bosses like Puweyxil can provide a stiff challenge if you're not careful.

» [SNES] The interlude map gives clever nods to the environments that await you.

» [SNES] In addition to a new score, *Super Castlevania IV* also features remixes of classic tunes.

battled skeletons in a revolving underground tunnel. Like *Super Metroid*, which would arrive several years later, the levels of *Super Castlevania IV* somehow feel alive and real, thanks to neat environmental details like leaves blowing in the wind, droplets of water spilling down from stalactites, or the ominous clouds that rush through the darkened skies as your press forward on your important quest. If we had one complaint about Konami's action hit, it's that some of the colour choices feel garish as your quest begins, but this soon fades the deeper you descend into Dracula's sanctum.

If certain elements of this macabre classic do sometimes falter in the graphics department, the same can't be said for *Super Castlevania IV*'s exceptional score. It's a wonderful, eclectic collection of tunes with a tremendous amount of range that truly pushes what you'd expect to hear from the console's S-SMP sound chip. Sampled music in videogames certainly wasn't new when *Super Castlevania IV* debuted, but the sheer ambition of composers ▶

Weapon of Choice

THESE ITEMS WILL GIVE YOU THE EDGE OVER DRACULA'S LACKEYS

Dagger

■ The dagger is one of the first weapons you'll find, and it's a good one. It's fast, accurate and uses one heart when activated.

Axe

■ This bulky weapon is slow and has an annoying trajectory, but it does deliver a decent amount of damage to enemies and it only costs one heart.

Whip Extension

■ Grab these whenever you see them as they enhance the Vampire Killer, making it longer and more powerful for a maximum of two upgrades.

Holy Water

■ For the cost of a single heart you can rain down pain on your unholy enemies. It has a low trajectory when thrown, so keep that in mind.

Cross

■ This is a rather handy weapon because in addition to damaging anything it hits, it returns like a boomerang, potentially inflicting even more pain.

Watch

■ It costs a hefty five hearts to use but it's worth it as this magical device can freeze time and most enemies. It doesn't last long, though.

SPELL BOOK
GHOST
GHOUL RABBIT
NEEDLE LIZARD
Boss Rush
KEY DEMONS STANDING BETWEEN SIMON AND VICTORY
Rowdain
The first end-of-stage boss you encounter in Super Castlevania IV is a skeletal knight that goes nowhere without his trusty skeletal steed.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Fire projectiles at the horse's head while avoiding its flaming fireballs. Once his mount is defeated, avoid Rowdain's leaps and return fire whenever he swings his lance.
Koranot
This gargantuan stone foe awaits you at the end of the Outer Keep stage and is a dizzying scaling Mode 7 showcase.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Avoid the rock it throws and the ones that fall from the ceiling when it jumps. Koranot gets smaller (and more nimble) as it takes damage.
Dancing Spectres
Fred Askare and Paula Abghoul await you at the end of the sixth stage and have some deadly moves to try out on you.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Keep your distance, avoid the three rapiers they throw at you and also keep an eye out for their deadly charge attack. Tricky, but manageable.
Akmodan II
This ancient, embalmed foe hangs out at the end of the clock tower stage and can't wait to wrap you in its dirty bandages.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
You're limited for space, so keep your distance (its bandages hint where it will teleport) and get in hits where you can.
Orphic Vipers
Two heads are better than one and it's certainly true for this scaly foe as it can fire both fireballs and a short-range flame at you.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Keep to the right, use the axe if you have it and avoid falling off the bottom of the screen. It's a tough early skirmish.
Zapf Bat
This beautiful boss is assembled from numerous jewels, gold and trinkets. It guards the treasury found at the end of the ninth stage.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Watch out for its swooping attacks and avoid the gold that falls when you strike it. Eventually it transforms into three smaller bats. Don't change tactics.
Slogra
This alien-looking foe can be quite challenging to get past, and is the first of three bosses that guard Dracula.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Avoid its sudden drops and keep low to duck its energy blasts. Eventually it will start stabbing you with its beak. Nasty.
Sir Grakul
This knight guards the end of stage seven and is a master of medieval weaponry, using various armaments to defeat you.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Avoid the axe he throws and watch out for flames that travel across the floor. He'll eventually draw his sword and try to finish you off.
The Monster
In addition to doing a mighty damn fine impression of Dr Frankenstein's creature, this gargantuan foe also has a nice range of coloured flasks.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
This is tough. Learn the contents of his three coloured bottles, avoid his deadly punches and look for openings where you can.
Gaibon
Like Slogra, this flying reptile made its debut in Super Castlevania IV and would go on to appear in many later games, often paired with Slogra.
HOW TO BEAT THEM:
Avoid its stream of fireballs and the projectiles that fall whenever it lands on the ground. Its attacks amplify massively when it turns red.
GIANT SPIDER

» [SNES] *Super Castlevania IV* doesn't introduce many new mechanics but its whip swinging is certainly one of our favourites.

Death

■ The penultimate boss before you reach Dracula is a fittingly tough challenge that needs luck and skill to master. Good luck!

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Avoid the scythes this reaper throws at you, leap over the giant scythe that is flung your way and pray he falls before you do.

Dracula

■ After slogging through 12 stages of 16-bit brilliance you encounter your final foe. Ready that Vampire Killer, it's gonna be a tough fight.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Aim for his head, avoid the many projectiles he flings at you and get as close as you can when he teleports. You've got this.

» [SNES] *Super Castlevania IV* is filled with graphical trickery, but Simon's journey through this underground tunnel remains a highlight.

MR HED

▶ Masanori Adachi and Taro Kudo as they attempted to cram an entire orchestra into the SNES – such as organs, woodwinds, brass, pianos, strings, bass and countless other instruments – really can't be faulted. From the complicated composition of *Secret Room* to the haunting melody of *Dripstone Cave* and the foreboding menace of *Dracula's Theme*, the entire soundtrack drips with atmosphere, effortlessly switching from playful and melodic to dark and brooding as Simon's epic journey continues. The score tells a story that's every bit as expressive as the on-screen visuals and it complements the action, too. Can you imagine traversing those gigantic Mode 7 chandeliers without that thunderous piano booming away in the background? Adachi and Kudo's legacy is not only one of the finest soundtracks to grace Nintendo's 16-bit console, but perhaps one of the greatest game scores of all time.

For all its aesthetic splendour it's rather disappointing then that *Super Castlevania IV*'s gameplay mechanics don't share the same evolutionary leap as earlier games in the series. That's not to say Ueno's team didn't add new things – Simon can now swing his whip in eight directions, flail it around him in an attempt to stop projectiles, and even use it to swing across certain sections of the game – but overall it does feel like something of a step back after the strides made to expand your exploratory options in *Dracula's Curse*. Of course, the nonlinear focus of that game would rear its head again for both *Rondo Of Blood* and *Symphony Of The Night*, but they're both Ultimate Guides for another time.

Super Castlevania IV's mechanics may not have significantly changed when compared to its predecessors, but they are exceptionally solid, and the tight movement of Simon as well as the mastery of control offered with his eight-way whip attacks ensure that boss fights, of which there are many, are never a chore to experience. In fact, *Super Castlevania IV*'s menagerie of devilish foes were arguably the best that fans of the series would have encountered at that point, and while a few stumbled due to their easy-to-learn attack patterns, they soon begin to put up a stiffer fight once you finally breached the walls of Dracula's castle.

Today, those boss encounters remain just as satisfying to experience, and equally satisfying is the ease with which Konami's game can now be accessed. While its Super Nintendo exclusivity and overall desirability means you'll get little, if any, change from £100 (should you desire a complete, boxed copy), its inclusion on the SNES Mini, as well as M2's excellent *Castlevania Anniversary Collection* for modern consoles, means that Konami's epic adventure is now attainable by anyone, not just those who backed Nintendo's 16-bit machine. And with Halloween fast approaching, there's no better time to experience Konami's magnificently macabre masterpiece. ✱

» [SNES] While its early stages can look a little gaudy, Konami's epic adventure can look quite stunning at times.

» [SNES] It's against the law to run a *Super Castlevania IV* article without mentioning these Mode 7 chandeliers.

WHIP SKELETON

ZOMBIE

Hardware Heaven

ESSENTIAL GAME

Kishin Douji Zenki: Vajra Fight

This anime tie-in plays pretty decently but looks absolutely excellent thanks to the 2D power of the PC-FX, as well as some great sprite art that has often been compared to that of Treasure's Saturn classic *Guardian Heroes*. The game consists of short beat-'em-up sections and plenty of boss fights, with fully voiced dialogue from the heroes and villains throughout. It's one of the most import-friendly PC-FX games, but this is also likely to be one expensive purchase – the most recent copies we saw sold for just under the £650 mark, which is an enormous investment for any individual game.

PC-FX

» **MANUFACTURER:** NEC » **YEAR:** 1994
» **COST:** ¥49,800 (launch), £225+ (today, boxed), £150+ (today, unboxed)

Few console manufacturers have seen as dramatic an inter-generational decline as NEC. Though it had struggled in America and abandoned any attempt to compete in Europe, the company had made a success of the PC Engine in Japan. The keys to that success were its small size, advanced gaming hardware and beloved games – all qualities that the PC-FX would come to lack. Developed to favour 2D gaming performance and high-quality video, the company was blindsided by the rapid advances in real-time 3D graphics and didn't have time to pivot. This problem was compounded by launching at a higher price than the PlayStation, and without recognisable properties such as *Bonk* and *Bomberman*.

Released in the days before the PS2 popularised vertical standing console designs, the PC-FX drew considerable attention for its design, which more resembled a computer tower than a traditional console. In that spirit, the boxy grey machine features no less than three expansion ports. The CD tray is somewhat unusual, as are the controller ports, but otherwise you could easily overlook this if you didn't know it was a console. You may do anyway, given that its library is predominantly comprised of FMV games and dodgy anime games. *

PC-FX fact

■ Despite Hudson Soft's role in developing the PC-FX hardware, it was not a prolific developer of software for the console, releasing just four self-published games for the system.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT NEC V810 CPU (21.5 MHZ)

RAM: 3.25MB RAM (2MB PROGRAM MEMORY, 1.25MB GRAPHICS MEMORY)

GRAPHICS: UP TO NINE SCROLLING LAYERS, EFFECTS INCLUDING SPRITE ROTATION AND COLOUR BLENDING, 16.77 MILLION COLOUR PALETTE, MOTION JPEG AT 30FPS

AUDIO: 16-BIT STEREO, TWO ADPCM CHANNELS AND SIX SAMPLE CHANNELS

STORAGE: 32KB BUILT-IN SRAM, OPTIONAL 128KB FX-BMP EXPANSION

MEDIA: 650MB CD-ROM

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF GAMES WORLD

Games World was the height of Nineties gaming television. This show and its four seasons proved that videogame-focused TV entertainment was viable. We reached out and challenged a trio of Videators to find out what working on the show was like

WORDS BY CONNOR MAKAR

» Here's the classic *Games World* logo, with the lightning-esque W weaved between the G. Cheap, sure, but packed with character.

» 'Beat The Elite' was the exciting grand finale of *Games World*, with a hype gladiatorial fight concluding every week.

Who were the Videators? The answer lies in the Friday showcase featured within *Games World*: 'Beat The Elite'. This game show had members of the public come in and challenge the show's collection of champions. These were the Videators, and they became recognisable characters that would appear weekly on *Games World*'s ultimate event. If you were a kid in the Nineties and wanted to prove you were more than just the best *Mario Kart* player on your street, the only way to prove your mettle was to come on the show and take on the Videators.

There's no better way to test your strength than to take part in a showdown with the Videators. Tracking down and challenging these champions today will be a sure-fire way to experience a slice of Nineties TV, as well a chance to learn what it was like behind the scenes of *Games World*.

But before we get to that, first an explanation of *Games World* is needed. Created by Hewland International as a small-budget TV show in early 1993, the show was a five-day-a-week videogame programme that did everything from tips and reviews, to game shows like the aforementioned Beat The Elite. This wasn't Hewland's first attempt at creating a gaming TV show but it was hugely popular at the time, helping to grow the then humble Sky One channel into what it is today.

The first Videator we found was Eddy Lawrence. Eddy previously played Radion Automatic on the show and has since gone on to work as a journalist. Eddy (appearing as Radion Automatic) had previously appeared on another of Hewland's videogame-focused shows called *GamesMaster*, before going on to play a Videator role on *Games World*. While he was only around during season one, there's no one better to vividly describe how exactly elite gamers became Videators than him. "It was a bit weird," he remembers. "I was 17 at the time and had just moved out of London. I had done a few episodes of *GamesMaster* as a reviewer, and I had a memorable name because I was named ▶

» Here you can see Eddy on *GamesMaster*, channelling the Nineties punk aesthetic even before donning his Videator attire.

» Even early on as a Videator Alex oozed charisma, and his performance as Big Boy Barry helped cement the Videators as a gaggle of lovable personalities.

» Before cash started rolling in, the team working on *Games World* had to make do with what they had – like this ramshackle Videator selection wheel.

THE CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE ONE
GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES
CONNOR VS RADION AUTOMATIC

For the fight against Radion Automatic, *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* was the game of choice. The first match was close, with each player chipping away at each other's health with wild punches and kicks, until the game was concluded with Connor throwing out a jumping kick that caught the Videator off-guard. The second game couldn't have been more different, and Connor wasn't able to overcome Radion Automatic's barrage of attacks. In the final game, both players held back, waiting to see what each other would do, spare the occasional smack. Suddenly, Radion Automatic switched to a super-aggressive playstyle. Connor didn't know how to keep him at bay and was overrun yet again. It wasn't even close.

» Every game with Radion Automatic was a close one, with each round coming down to a few stray hits and singular outplays.

» In spite of the neck-and-neck nature of the matches, Radion clutched out the final game with a last-minute character change.

CHALLENGE TWO
SUPER MARIO KART
CONNOR VS BIG BOY BARRY

Barry picked *Super Mario Kart* as his battleground of choice, him choosing Yoshi while Connor chose Toad. One race on Bowser's Castle would determine if it was possible to overcome the daunting Big Boy. It started off close, with both racers neck-and-neck around the first and second laps, until disaster struck. Connor collided with Thwomps that littered the course which halted all momentum, while Barry weaved his way forward into a decisive lead. That mistake was followed by another blunder, as Connor fell into lava surrounding the course in a desperate attempt to close the distance. From there it wasn't even a competition, Barry soared past the finish line, leaving Connor dumbstruck at the definitive result.

» Here's where it all went wrong, with a super-wide turn and a plunge straight into the lava, allowing Alex to gain the lead.

» Once the Big Boy got the lead he never let it go, maintaining the distance all the way until he crossed the finish line.

CHALLENGE THREE
SUPER TENNIS
CONNOR VS THE VIOLET BLADE

Then came Connor's final opportunity to prove that he was, in spite of previous evidence, good at videogames. Rik once again became The Violet Blade and picked his *Games World* speciality *Super Tennis* for our game. Connor scuffed the first four games in a row with barely any points to show for it. Determined not to lose, he focused up and managed to clutch a close fifth game setting the score to 4-1 in Violet Blade's favour. From there, Connor went on the offensive, taking game after game until he tied up the set at four a piece. Tragically, the Blade snatched back the lead and took the ninth and tenth games, officially transforming Connor from an aspiring champion into a massive loser.

» Right from the get-go the game started off poorly, with Rik shooting ahead with a dominating lead.

» In spite of Connor's attempts to claw back a victory, Violet Blade proved too powerful a pirate and pulverised the opposition.

VIDEATORS ASSEMBLE

THE SHOW'S MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS

MASTER MORIARTY

SEASONS 1 – 2

Master Moriarty is one of the most charming Videators from the early seasons, acting as a deeply detestable character due to his snobby attitude.

THE EXECUTIONER

SEASONS 1 – 2

Here's a bloke who donned bondage gear as he conquered dozens of kids via Beat The Elite. Memorable, daunting and frankly fantastic at *Street Fighter*.

THE VIOLET BLADE

SEASONS 1 – 3

The original software pirate, The Violet Blade was an antagonistic character who'd shout, 'Arrrgh!' and steamroll the poor kids who appeared on the show.

ELECTRIC EDDIE

SEASON 3

A robotic man making good use of his enhancements to play videogames, Electric Eddie shocked audiences with his skills in a variety of titles.

When the Videators actually played, they sat side by side with the contestants, leading to some hilarious character moments between the two contenders.

after a lurid washing powder rather than having a normal human name. They [Hewland] put out a call among certain games mag publishers saying they were looking for people for a new show. I thought, 'Yeah, why not?' and went down for the role of a Videator.

"There was a cab driver I used to use a lot that I was quite friendly with, and on my way down to the screen test he produced a 'jazz cigarette' which a few of us shared," Eddy continues. "I then turned up, 17 and with no idea what the fuck I was doing, and they kind of pointed a camera at me and wanted me to tell them about myself. I was very surprised when I got a call back and was told I got the part."

What about the character we saw on the show? How did that manifest itself as it did? While the name Radion Automatic was taken from Eddy's pre-existing writing work, the version we actually saw took a lot of work to get TV-ready. "I was supposed to be this grunge gladiator of videogames kind of character," Eddy explains. "So the costume designer had created this sort of army kit, it was basically an olive vest and shorts that had been sewn together into a one-piece. I showed up and I think they were expecting a normal human. My body shape looks like I've been badly assembled from pipe cleaners, and I'm pale like a corpse, so I knew it wouldn't work. At the time, I wore a lot of cut-off trousers and boots, so I wore them over that costume and it looked a lot better. So when you look at the costume, I was wearing my own boots, trousers and my favourite coat, which they ruined with a bunch of shit they sewed onto it. It went from the gladiator idea to a deranged street performer."

> "THE FIRST SERIES WAS A BIG HIT FOR SKY, SO THEY RECOMMISSIONED IT. SERIES TWO GOT MUCH MORE MONEY, IT WAS MUCH MORE PROFESSIONAL, AND IT WAS THAT YEAR I WAS OFFERED MY OWN SHOW AS A BREAKOUT CONCEPT CALLED BARRY'S JOYPAD"
>
> **ALEX VERREY**

Next on our Videator hit-list is Big Boy Barry, also known as Alex Verrey, who was a huge star among the cast of Videators. Not only did he take part in the Beat The Elite show during season one, he went on to get his own segment by the name of Barry's Joypad in later seasons. This sitcom and his following popularity thrust Barry forward as the face of the show – he would go on to film in several international locations as part of his role on *Games World*. "This was all before the days of pro gaming, so us Videators were the original pro gamers. Twitch had nothing on us!" he tells us. Alex now works in public relations for the videogame industry and is director of PR at Heaven Media.

"I worked with the producers and a young researcher by the name of David Walliams (yes,

BIG BOY BARRY

SEASONS 1 – 3

He's big, he's bad and he's arguably the most popular Videator. Barry was a dangerous competitor, and so entertaining he got a show from season two onwards.

MR MATHERS 'THE MEGABYTE MILLIONAIRE'

SEASONS 2 – 3

A true villain, Mr Mathers was stinking rich and would yell at audiences to keep their distance, lest he touch the proles of the lower class.

METRO

SEASON 4

A champion fighter and courteous Videator, Metro only appeared in the final season but made a big impact with both his fists and well-kept beard.

LORD LESLIE MATHERS

SEASON 4

A big game hunter setting his scopes on *Games World* contestants rather than wildlife, Lord Mathers was as devilish on a controller as he was with a rifle.

that David Walliams)," Alex remembers. "We put the character of Big Boy Barry together. Originally the character was going to be named 'Fat Boy', but we decided that would be a little bit harsh for a poor 15-year-old kid who would still be at school at the time, so that got changed to 'Big Boy'. It was going to be more of a Harry Enfield style character – a not-subtle swipe at the 'loads of money' shtick – a wide Essex boy and very dislikable. Somehow that just transformed into a slightly happier character, just as arrogant but a little more likable."

Alex notes the difference between season one and two, and how the shift came with a massive change to his experience. "We didn't know what we were doing in series one, but my job was quite easy," he tells us. "The strength of the competitors was pretty shit because the show hadn't caught on yet. A lot of the Videators were pretty bad, as some of them were actors rather than videogame players. For example, you had this talented guy playing The Ninja who was used to doing lots of suit work for Jim Henson, he played one of the Ninja Turtles in the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies. He was a great martial artist, he had a great stage presence, but he didn't know how to play videogames. So he'd go out and he'd lose pretty much every time, and it became a common theme.

"Things kicked up a notch with series two," Alex continues. "The first series was a big hit for Sky, so they recommissioned it. Series two got much more money, it was much more professional, and it was that year I was offered my own show as a breakout concept called Barry's Joypad. At that point I dedicated my life to Big Boy Barry. I finished school and got to fly around the world. It was a lot more intense in series two – so too when I was doing the challenges, as alongside the sitcom side I'd still be taking part in Beat The Elite.

"I could tell there was something there, around midway through season one I started being recognised in the street and seeing my photo in publicity shots more. So I could see that something was brewing. I was going to award ceremonies with Hewland International, but I was probably too young to fully realise it. I was surprised at just how big it got, and I was at the leap in quality after series one."

Our final interviewee is a third Videator with behind-the-camera experience that's needed to truly understand *Games World*. Thankfully, there's no Videator that fits that knows quite as much as the scourge of the videogame seas himself, The Violet Blade. Rik Henderson was the buccaneer that terrified many a contestant back in the day, but now he finds himself as the editor at *Pocket Lint*. Not only was he a beloved Videator but he also produced the show behind ▶

» Bob Mills (left) was the presenter of the first three seasons of Sky's *Games World*. Andy Collins would take over the role for season four.

SERIES HOT TAKES

A QUICK GUIDE TO EACH SEASON

SEASON 1

The original season of *Games World* was a tad low-budget compared to the others, but what it was lacking in production values it made up for in DIY charm. With cheap sets and costumes, Hewland managed to snatch the attention of the public with this early rendition of the show.

SEASON 2

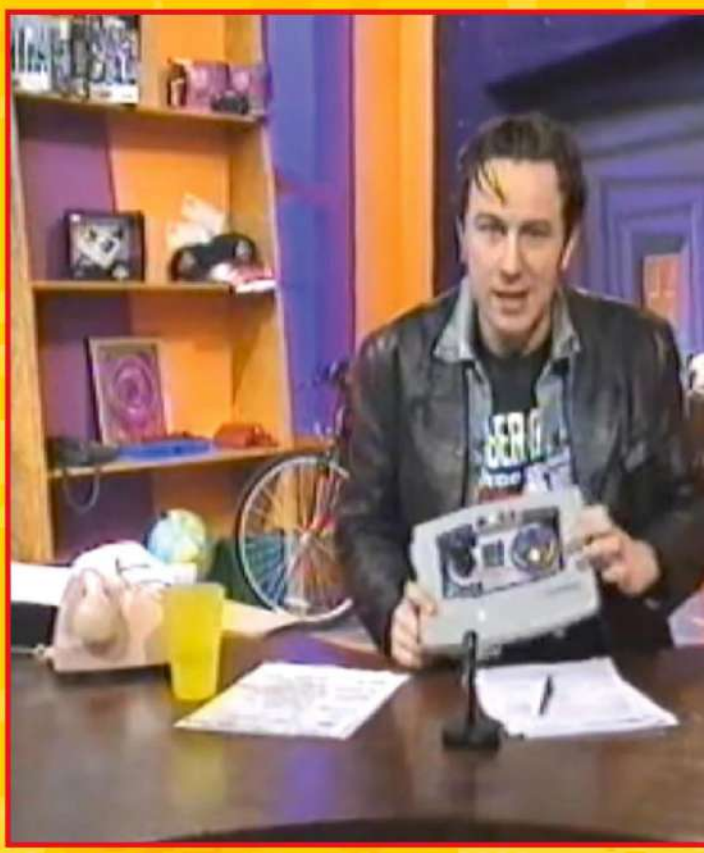
Back with more money and a snazzy new set to boot, *Games World*'s second season was an overall improvement on the first. Season two also came with Barry's Joypad, a comedy show that featured videogame reviews and deep dives with Big Boy Barry as the star of the segments.

SEASON 3

Games World at the height of its popularity – this is when *Games World* had the best shows, the best costumes and the best production value. Barry's Joypad changed to Barry TV, and the majority of segments were vastly improved.

SEASON 4

The fourth season popped up on screens after a hiatus, with a new set and format. Sadly, this season scrapped lots of the unique events from the previous seasons and is solely a game show. Thankfully, there's still plenty fun to be had in this final showing.



» From the leather jacket to the uber-colourful background, and, of course, the pastel-pink landline on the desk, the whole show was deep in the muck of the Nineties.

the scenes, so If anyone knew about what it was like to work on *Games World* it was Rik.

His transformation was somewhat of a leap of faith. Working as a videogames journalist, he was looking for something new before the opportunity fell into his lap. "A friend of mine was working on *GamesMaster* – a guy called Doug Johns (who later became the Videator Games Messiah)," Rik tells us. "He contacted me and just said, 'We're launching *Games World*, would you like to be a part of it?' I didn't know what he meant, but I went along and became a researcher. About a year after making *Games World* I was associate producer, because I had gone to acting school when I was younger and I was doing everything behind the camera, they asked if I would like to be on camera as well!"

As previously established, *Games World* was a big deal at the time, but Rik elaborates on just how much gold Hewland struck with the show and how much work it took to pull it off. "The *Games World* final outperformed *The Simpsons* three years in a row. It was a mad show with a different show on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday!" he says. "To be honest, they were very long days. The way the schedule worked is you would do the research and pre-production section for months – getting all the games and calling all the games companies etc. Then we'd have a two/three-week block-booking where we would film a whole load of shows – including the Eliminator and Beat The Elite. We would film two Eliminators and a Beat The Elite every single day (including weekends) for a few weeks. Then that would run for the 26 weeks of the show, then we'd bring people back for the final if they got through that far."

With these long days and a wide range of shows, Rik has plenty of great memories about the show and the team. "So on the previous Friday's Beat The Elite, I (Violet Blade) kidnapped Alex Verrey (Big Boy Barry), because I lost at a game," he remembers. "I come running out on the show with a baseball bat and scream at Big Boy Barry, I hit him in the stomach (which I genuinely did on accident), and I dragged him off. Everyone was confused because we didn't even tell some of the crew. Next week we start Barry TV and it's a kidnapped episode with me, Alex, David Walliams, and Charlene. It was the camaraderie and the comedy on set. These were long hours, but we had a great time filming. Everybody liked it and everyone got on. I still have some of the camera men and others as good personal friends to this day."

"After days of researching, we'd all sit in the games room and play *Mario Kart* or *Micro Machines*, or whatever came in!" Rik continues. "We just got a couple of beers in and spent an evening in the games room. Me and Dominik Diamond (commentator for *GamesMaster*) would love to play *Micro Machines* with people, sometimes for money."

Imagine what kids back then felt, taking on these peerless icons of videogame supremacy, with a lot of laughs and love weaved throughout the whole shebang. It's an idea and experience that hasn't really been replicated in the videogame industry, not really. Sure, there are superstars and immensely skilled gamers, but some plucky teenagers from Bristol will never get to face off against them, and certainly not on a booming TV show. To wrap this whole thing up, the Videators who were integral to the appeal and success of the show share what they think of the show looking back, nearly three decades down the line.

Eddy believes it was the perfect thing at the perfect time, that captured the imagination of the public at a time when videogames are what they craved. "I knew one guy who had Sky, so I thought no one was going to see it, but it became this massive thing. Now, looking back, I am not at all surprised because it was the right moment for it. Games were really catching the public imagination, and there wasn't really much in the way of games media. It was so perfectly of its time, it was so fucking Nineties. The fact that it is very over the top, very camp."

> "I THOUGHT NO ONE WAS GOING TO SEE IT, BUT IT BECAME THIS MASSIVE THING. NOW, LOOKING BACK, I AM NOT SURPRISED BECAUSE IT WAS THE RIGHT MOMENT FOR IT. GAMES WERE REALLY CATCHING THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION, AND THERE WASN'T REALLY MUCH IN THE WAY OF GAMES MEDIA"
> **EDDY LAWRENCE**

Alex notes that it provided something nothing else really did at the time, a rare glimpse into the work of games that we take for granted nowadays. "There were aspects of the show that were so exciting at the time, a time when it was the only way you could see videogames moving in action. You can't underestimate the importance of that, you would never see trailers or gameplay online because it didn't exist. So this was the first time people could see *Street Fighter* or the PlayStation in action, or *Super Mario 64*! A lot of those elements wouldn't work today as the internet has replaced a lot of that, competitive gaming has dozens of sources where that's available like Twitch. But there was nothing like it at the time. It was very creative and proper television."

And finally, Rik believes that something in the *Games World* style will never be done again and remains a true product of its time. "Jane Hewland had an incredible idea to hire the people who knew the subject and make them into TV people, not the other way around. *Games World* was made by enthusiasts. Everything you see on that show comes from someone that doesn't only know about games, but genuinely cares about them. So we tried to make shows that we would want to watch, with an entertainment slant.

"I think the games industry has moved on dramatically, and obviously we have streaming services and a lot of gaming content constantly being streamed. But for me, there will never be anything quite like the general idea of using games as an entertainment medium, rather than trying to push a games agenda." ✱

» Looking back at the show today, and it provides a perfect window in to the attitude of the Nineties.

» The Videators were often larger than life and rubbed their superior skill in the contestants' faces.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Jumping Flash!

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION » **RELEASED:** 1995 » **DEVELOPER:** EXACT, ULTRA

As a new PlayStation owner, one thing constantly astounded you – just how interesting a seemingly tired genre could become once 3D was added to the mix. The endless stream of cutesy Mega Drive platformers was boring you, but once again you found yourself playing a cutesy platform game, because for once you'd found one that seemed genuinely different.

Of course, it could only be *so* different, so after the opening couple of stages you were bracing for a boss. But what a boss it was! A whacking great red dragon dropped into the scene, before taking flight and breathing fire right at your face. Resorting to your platform game experience, you leapt onto a nearby hill and from there up on to the head of the dragon, only for it to angle its neck upwards and attempt to flame grill you from below. Out of desperation, you unloaded your arsenal of special weapons to take down your new nemesis – a rash move, but one only fitting for the kind of boss you'd never, ever seen before. ✱

BIO

After creating the sci-fi shooter *Geograph Seal* for the Sharp X68000, Exact paired with Ultra to work on a game for Sony, to debut on its new PlayStation console. The result was *Jumping Flash!*, a game which drew from *Geograph Seal*'s mechanics to create an innovative first-person platformer. The press considered it one of the highlights of the console's early line-up, lauding its originality but criticising it for its short length. *Jumping Flash!* later received a sequel, a Japan-only third game and the Japanese exclusive PocketStation game compilation *Pocket MuuMuu*.

MORE CLASSIC JUMPING FLASH! MOMENTS

Critical Altitude

Thanks to Robbit's triple jump and level design that emphasises height as much as width, *Jumping Flash* offers some spectacular views as you look down at stages from above. Of course, those are fleeting moments before plummets that will flip your stomach over, but they're definitely beautiful while they last.

Ride The Rails

Stage 3-2 is set in an amusement park, and Robbit gets to do the thing we all want to do when we visit them – ride rollercoasters. Jumping on the rainbow pathways will whisk Robbit away through dips and climbs at high speeds, often to destinations that are crucial to finding the jet pods needed to finish the stage.

Crossover Star

While the tunnel stages are arguably the game's weakest, there's a cool moment in stage 4-2. Early on, you'll pass through an open area – a sunken cavern with a shipwreck and a glass tunnel. Later on, close to the end of the stage, you end up crossing your own path as you dash through that same tunnel.

Party Pooper

If you manage to find a warp to one of the game's bonus stages, you'll be tasked with popping a bunch of balloons – the favoured activity of killjoys worldwide. The rewards are pretty good though, as the balloons contain power-ups and you'll get an extra life if you manage to pop them all within the time limit.

THE MAKING OF
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK™
ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

THERE'S USUALLY AN INVISIBLE BUT PRETTY STRICT LIMIT ON THE QUALITY OF A MOVIE TIE-IN GAME, BUT IN 2004 A LITTLE-KNOWN SWEDISH STUDIO BUCKED THE TREND, BUILDING A RIDDICK GAME IN A PIONEERING ENGINE THAT BEAT ID AND VALVE TO THE NEW GENERATION

WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK

You don't have to spend much time in the steel-capped boots of Riddick to realise that *Escape From Butcher Bay* is no ordinary movie tie-in videogame. After a tutorial that ends with the somewhat cheap 'just a dream' get-out, you're thrown for real into Butcher Bay prison – a brutalist behemoth of steel and stone on some wasteland planet in a forgotten corner of the cosmos.

For the first five minutes you're on rails, escorted by guards through a building that you imagine smells like a damp metallic mix of rust and blood. Dramatic music plays, credits fade in revealing star voice talent like Ron Perlman, Xzibit and, of course, Vin Diesel. Then, you're thrown into a cell with a single goal: escape.

The sequence evokes *Half-life*'s famous tram ride prologue, but with a blockbuster movie polish rarely seen in games at the time. The *Half-life* homage is fitting, because just as Gordon Freeman's seminal commute heralded a new generation of gaming, so Riddick's prison walk ushered in a new era of game engines, somehow beating *Doom 3*'s id Tech 4 and *Half-life 2*'s Source engine to showcasing the latest graphical technologies.

Starbreeze Studios wasn't a prolific developer in 2002. It was just coming off its first major console release, a dark fantasy RPG called *Enclave*. The game was reasonably well-received, but *Butcher Bay* lead writer Mikael Saker remembers that its real value lay in the studio getting the experience of actually releasing a game. "It was a very educational development where we just managed to ship *something*," he tells us. "After that we felt empowered. We'd shipped a game and were ready to take on the next thing."

Starbreeze hoped that next thing would be an original IP, but in the absence of options a

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ENCLAVE
SYSTEM: PC, XBOX, WII
YEAR: 2002

THE DARKNESS
SYSTEM: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2007

BROTHERS: A TALE OF TWO SONS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2013

MIKAEL SAKER

Mikael worked for Starbreeze all the way up to *Assault On Dark Athena*, before moving on to DICE to work on the *Battlefield* franchise. He's currently taking time away from videogames to finish his first novel.

JENS ANDERSSON

Jens currently shares his time between his indie studios Collecting Smiles and Villa Gorilla (which made *Yoku's Island Express*). He's recently completed a successful Kickstarter campaign to fund his passion project, *Colors Live*, which will be out on Nintendo Switch soon.

PETE WANAT

Pete returned to *Riddick* as executive producer on *Dark Athena*, before helping produce other games like *Lego Jurassic World* and some Telltale Games. He then cofounded mobile sports games dev Nifty Games, which most recently launched *NFL Clash*.

Riddick game fitted with the studio's visions. Back in 2004, Vin Diesel's Riddick character was only known from the cult sci-fi movie *Pitch Black*. The next *Riddick* movie was yet to be greenlit, so even though the game would need to adapt to the movie's mythos as it was being written, it still offered Starbreeze plenty of creative freedom.

Butcher Bay producer and Starbreeze founding member Jens Andersson says that a *Riddick* game was the next best thing to an original IP. "Everyone enjoyed the original *Pitch Black*," he recalls. "It had a B-movie vibe and felt very open in terms of what a game taking place elsewhere in that world would look like."

Work began on *Escape From Butcher Bay* in 2002, and the original concept was to make it a free-roaming *Grand Theft Auto*-style game. *Vice City* had just come out, and the 'open world' label still carried an aura of mystery and endless possibilities. This initial idea didn't last long, as Starbreeze had bigger ambitions than to follow the flavour of the year. The team began incorporating stealth and light RPG elements that brought *Butcher Bay* closer to the Looking Glass school of games like *Deus Ex* and *Thief*.

This rethink didn't sit easily with publisher Vivendi Universal, not least because it required a shift to a first-person perspective which meant its star Vin Diesel didn't get as much screen time. "The solution was to have these action cutscenes, so that when you climb a ladder or enter a vent you shift to third-person for a bit," says Mikael. "It had technical benefits because you could reposition the character and make transitions look very smooth, but it also showed the character."

Not that Vin Diesel, a game enthusiast whose very own Tigon Studios was copublishing *Butcher Bay*, was desperate to hog the limelight. Vivendi Universal producer Pete Wanat witnessed Vin Diesel's dedication to the character first-hand. "Vin doesn't think of games as lunchboxes but as art, and it showed," he recalls. "He once showed up to recording only to pause the session while he spent five hours rewriting his dialogue with Flint [Dille]. Was it stressful? Sure, but we got Riddick (not Vin) in the fucking studio. And that voice recording is still one of the best ever in a game."

» [PC] A section was added to the PC *Developer's Cut* that lets you run amok in a mechanised armour suit.

"EVERYONE ENJOYED THE ORIGINAL PITCH BLACK, IT HAD A B-MOVIE VIBE AND FELT VERY OPEN IN TERMS OF WHAT A GAME TAKING PLACE ELSEWHERE IN THAT WORLD WOULD LOOK LIKE"
JENS ANDERSSON

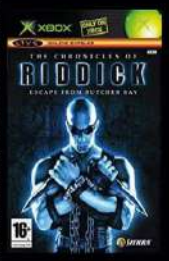
"He knew the character much better than we did, so the amount of words that came out of that session was less than originally written," says Jens. This wasn't just an actor lending VO to an existing character, it was an actor in the midst of crafting a character for both movie and game, and his hands-on approach shows in the quality of the dialogue. Riddick's a calm killer of few words, but when he does speak it's with growling authority and cosmos-cold menace.

Meanwhile, Starbreeze was struggling to gel the disparate parts of *Butcher Bay* into a cohesive whole. "We really had to fight for it," says Jens. "First thing to do was prove 'can we do melee fighting?' and come up with different implementations on the melee systems. Since the game is in a prison you can't just put a gun in the hand of the player from the get-go. We needed other strong gameplay elements, too."

One of these other elements was the RPG aspect. At this time, ideas like quests, complex puzzles, multiple routes to completion and an NPC dialogue system were rare in action-oriented shooters. "We had to find ways of having 'lite' RPG elements that didn't take over the game – skill trees, advanced NPCs that could react to various things, that kind of stuff," says Mikael.

These RPG systems exhibit the game at its subtle best. Between high-intensity action sequences where you're shooting guards or

» [PC] Everything in Butcher Bay feels hostile, even these rapier-like health jabs.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES

» **DEVELOPER:** STARBREEZE STUDIOS

» **RELEASED:** 2004

» **PLATFORM:** XBOX, PC

» **GENRE:** STEALTH/FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

PC PERFECTION

HOW 2004'S DEVELOPER'S CUT IS THE DEFINITIVE VERSION OF THE GAME

The PC version of *Escape From Butcher Bay*, released back in 2004, is a timeless gem of optimisation. It has unlocked resolutions, supports 144Hz refresh rates, and probably counts among the oldest games in the world that still look great today. It features a whole extra action segment involving riot armour, which is a blast in every sense of the word, and once you complete the game, you can play through it all again with developer commentary.

There's a whole bunch of 'Making Of' documentaries, concept art and other goodies that give it that early Noughties DVD kind of charm. You can even watch a video of the game's early prototype, which helps you appreciate how far it came towards the end of development.

The catch is that you can't get it on any digital games sites any more due to licensing issues, but you *can* find it on the internet – though it is not something that we can endorse. Physical versions are still out there, and we've seen cases of people playing above 1080p resolution, and Nvidia users should Google a certain fix that stops the game crashing on modern PCs.

being chased by mutants through a radioactive subterrane, there are long segments where you're mingling with prison inmates. You exchange favours for shivs and clubs, take part in fighting tournaments and build a reputation amidst the prison populace in your bid to escape.

It's a brave play on power and pacing to suddenly strip the player of their precious gun arsenal, but the strength of *Butcher Bay*'s melee combat, stealth and immersive sim leanings arguably outshine the more marketable shooting segments, which are often spectacular, but also linear and generic.

We share with Jens and Mikael our preference for the game's quieter segments over the shooting. "I think we all enjoyed them more actually," Jens tells us. "Whenever you make games, you don't know what the game is until it's close to done. I don't think we realised what we were doing until very late in the project, when we saw the balance between the different genres and how we divided it up."

But the very things that made for such a great end product also caused a turbulent development. The powerful in-house engine was hard to master, and there were so many diverse ideas going into *Butcher Bay* that Starbreeze struggled to convey to the publishers exactly what kind of game it was making. "It was very hard to pick out a vertical slice and say, 'This is what the game will be,' even for us internally at the studio," says Jens.

The *Butcher Bay* project struggled through 2003. Starbreeze had been working on two other projects at the time but the publishers for those went bankrupt, leading to a sudden funding shortage that forced the studio to ask its *Riddick* publisher for more money to complete the project. "We basically had to tell them that we need money otherwise the project won't be finished at all," remembers Jens.

By the end of the year, a release date had been confirmed for the *Chronicles Of Riddick* movie, but it looked unlikely that the game would be able to meet it. *Butcher Bay* was still in alpha and largely broken, with framerate issues, a poorly functioning melee system and an endless sea of bugs.

At one point, Jens remembers that the game was as good as cancelled... until Pete Wanat intervened. "Yes, there was a time when one particular executive at Vivendi Universal very much wanted to kill the game," Pete recalls. "They were more excited about a *Van Helsing* and *Fight Club* game that was in development at the time, but that's just part of fighting the good fight."

A casualty of this bailout was the PS2 version of *Butcher Bay*, which was scrapped. Sony's flagship console was more successful than the Xbox, but its weaker hardware meant running a game as advanced as *Butcher Bay* was a challenge. "A lot of the key components, like shadows and dynamic lighting, weren't really available, but we had a great team working on that which found other ways of using dynamic lightmaps," says Jens. "I'm convinced it could have been done and become a great game."

TIGON TALES THE STRANGE GAMES OF VIN DIESEL'S STUDIO.. STARRING VIN DIESEL

WHEELMAN 2009

What do you associate with Vin Diesel? Goggles, tank tops and cars, maybe? With the *Dark Athena* game covering those first two accessories in 2009, Tigon had to complete the trinity by making a Vin Diesel car game. *Wheelman* is a fun *GTA*-style romp that sees you screeching your way around a Barcelona-style city.

ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA 2009

A HD remaster of *Escape From Butcher Bay* bundled with a multiplayer mode and the titular Dark Athena chapter. The Dark Athena segment feels quite linear next to Butcher Bay, and the multiplayer seems bolted on, but it's still a solid *Riddick* package even if it doesn't quite build on the original game as much as it could have.

RIDDICK: THE MERC FILES 2013

This mobile game condensed the *Riddick* franchise into a swipey stealth game. It lacks depth, and after the immersive experience of exploring Butcher Bay it just feels too distant from Riddick for you to really embody the character. It has slinked in and out of app stores as silently as the milky-eyed man himself.

FAST & FURIOUS CROSSROADS 2020

Tigon Studios' first new game in years, *Fast & Furious Crossroads* is a throwback to the *Twisted Metal* days of cars kitted out with rocket launchers and tyre-shredding rims. The schlocky action story is silly fun, but the game feels woefully clunky and dated, looking like it should of arrived in 2010 rather than 2020.

» [PC] Beneath Butcher Bay you'll fight these mutants in a couple of intense horror sequences.

» [PC] Donald Trump found the residents of Butcher Bay harder to persuade than the citizens of modern-day America.

» [PC] There's plenty to appreciate in the brutalist architecture, assuming you can survive for a few minutes without getting a shiv between the ribs.

» [PC] The *Deus Ex* influence is clear, as you'll spend a good bit of time crawling through Butcher Bay's ventilation systems.

A key factor in Starbreeze's struggles was working with an in-house engine that was being forged by studio founder Magnus Hogdahl concurrently with the game. Jens describes Magnus as a tech genius, who was obsessed with John Carmack's id Tech engine and gleaned everything he could from it.

Mikael recalls one time when Magnus showed people online snippets of John Carmack demonstrating id Tech. "I remember at one point Magnus showed us a clip showing how real-time tessellation works – if you had a curved pipe, you could build it with a lot of polygons but limit the number of polygons the further you got from the object," says Mikael. "The next day, he had implemented it in the Starbreeze engine. He was a really driven guy."

Despite the engine's challenges, about six months before the game's looming release things started to finally fall into place. The team began to fully understand and harness the technology and mechanics at their disposal. On Xbox, for example, the engine was only capable of displaying four or five characters on-screen at once. "That's why the whole courtyard in Prison Area 2 is divided," says Mikael. "It feels natural, but the main reason for doing that was to limit the number of characters on-screen."

Other technical aspects began coming together, turning *Butcher Bay* from a broken game into a groundbreaking one. "Visually, a couple of simple tricks like the dynamic light maps started to work, and suddenly the melee fighting was really fun," Jens tells us. This breakthrough in melee mechanics caused Starbreeze to add in an entire melee-oriented section of the game (Aquilas Territory) just 24 hours before one of the final development milestones. "In my mind, it's one of the best sections of the game," says Jens. "It fits the prison mentality thing so well."

> "VISUALLY, A COUPLE OF SIMPLE TRICKS LIKE THE DYNAMIC LIGHT MAPS STARTED TO WORK, AND SUDDENLY THE MELEE FIGHTING WAS REALLY FUN"
> **JENS ANDERSSON**

Both Jens and Mikael admit to not really knowing whether the game they sent for release was actually much good. Starbreeze had shrunk from 80 staff to 18 by the end of development, and the focus was on finding the next project to keep the studio afloat. Following the box office failure of *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, plans for subsequent *Riddick* games were shelved until the *Assault On Dark Athena* semi-sequel in 2009.

Escape From Butcher Bay sold well and was one of the best-rated games of its generation. It benefitted from delays to *Half-life 2* and *Doom 3* to become the very first game to showcase many of the graphical breakthroughs we'd soon see in the Source and id Tech 4 engines. Amidst impressive dynamic shadows, the highly textured faces that'd emerge from them, and the obscurity of a movie IP that never fulfilled its potential, a silent trailblazer was born.

Battletoads

They've starred in infamously tough games, they've been cartoon heroes and they've even been the bane of Gamestop employees across America. Now Zitz, Rash and Pimple are back, so we found out how the developers approached their return

Words by Nick Thorpe

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** XBOX GAME STUDIOS
- **DEVELOPER:** DLALA STUDIOS, RARE
- **RELEASE:** 2020
- **PLATFORM:** PC, XBOX
- **GENRE:** ACTION

Gaming has had some unlikely comeback stories, but the 2020 revival of *Battletoads* is a particularly impressive one. When the game was announced at E3 two years prior, it was the first sign of new activity for the series in well over two decades – and while the series wasn't forgotten, it had acquired a certain reputation. For most people under the age of 30, Rare's brawler was most recognisable as a staple of prank calls and lists of obnoxiously hard games. While a residual fondness drove those things, could Rare and Dlala Studios get people to take a new *Battletoads* seriously?

Fortunately, that question never needed answering. After a triumphant brawl through the first stage, the second stage throws any pretence of seriousness out of the window as Pimple becomes a masseuse and Zitz sends repetitive emails – all under your control. "When we were writing things and decided that the toads were going to have to go back to basics, to go to a job agency and get jobs, we were like, 'It would be funny if it was a story beat, but how much funnier would it be if you had to play these stupid jobs?'" says AJ Grand-Scrutton of Dlala Studios, designer and director of 2020's *Battletoads*. "When we spoke publicly we had these big pillars, but there was a hidden pillar. On a big blackboard in the middle of the office, we had, 'Does this make you say stupid game?' and that kind of embodied our approach to making the game. We wanted a game we took seriously [in terms of] making, but that was just a ridiculous game – and not for the sake of it, but so that it made sense in the story we were telling."

That story sees Zitz, Rash and Pimple reduced to would-be heroes in search of the

» [Xbox One] The more a scene appears, the more mechanical depth it has – space combat is quite well-rounded.

» [Xbox One] Ass-kickers they may be, but in 2020 the Battletoads often have more confidence than luck, leading to hilarity.

» [Xbox One] Rash's dead fish morph attack really shows off the animation style the developers were going for.

fame they used to have, with their over-the-top Nineties attitude reimagined as an alarming capacity for poor decision-making and accidental mayhem. This cartoon attitude permeates everything, from the story presentation to the in-game graphics. "It was a real mixture of classic *Tex Avery* and *Looney Tunes* stuff, and then we wanted to combine in Nineties era, early Noughties Nicktoons and Cartoon Network – you know, when cartoons really started going *weird*," AJ explains. "Also, that influence from the kind of games we grew up with – not just *Battletoads* but the amazing platformers of the Nineties that you used to get on the Genesis and the SNES. They still look beautiful, the animation is fantastic and they're timeless. So that all just went into this blender and came out through the lens of our animation director Eric [Ciccone]." This went down well over at Rare, too. "What really sold it for us that first time is when we saw the eyes popping out of Rash, Pimple and Zitz," says Paul Collins of Rare, who worked on the creative side of *Battletoads*. "That feeling of

» [Xbox One] We hadn't expected to encounter tricky puzzles, but *Battletoads* defied our expectations.

» [Xbox One] Even within the combat stages, puzzles provide something to do other than beating up baddies.

encapsulating all of this cool stuff inside of this Saturday morning cartoon just added that nostalgic feeling to it, that we were really keen to capture."

Of course, cartoon animation without a game design won't get you very far, and this was what came up when we asked about the key characteristics of *Battletoads* that the team wanted to preserve. "The big one for me was the genre mash-up side of things," says AJ. "When I think of what *Battletoads* means to me as a game and a franchise, I always swing towards that first *Battletoads* and *Battletoads/Double Dragon* more than any of the others, so when we were approaching this I really wanted to make sure we nailed home the erratic, permanently changing game genres." At the same time, the team needed to think of how to improve upon the old formula. "I think some of the stuff that stood out for us was just amplifying all of those existing genres, but at the same time allowing Dlala to just go crazy and really staple some new genres into it," says Paul. "One of the things I like to look at is combat, that feeling of the smash hits happening at certain moments, but we really wanted to let players feel like they were in control of all the moves this time, to feel like they have that feeling of mastery. I've really liked seeing all the different Twitch streams of people trying out the moves and trying out

» [Xbox One] The sled stage proves how tricky it is to balance difficulty – we struggled more in this mid-game scene than anywhere else.

stuff that I didn't even think of before."

Difficulty is another key part of the *Battletoads* identity, but one where authenticity potentially creates a barrier to wide enjoyment of the product. "This is definitely one of the most interesting challenges we had throughout the project," says AJ. "One of the advantages of working with Rare is that it gave us access to things that we don't always get ourselves, such as user testing. But it's definitely hard and you never really know how difficult something is as the creator, because you can never appreciate how much you've adjusted to the stuff you've made. I actually think the game's a bit harder than I thought it was, seeing people play and their reactions." Apart from including three difficulty levels, the developers chose to add some reactive aids and extra goals. "There are the invincibility flies – on Tadpole and Toad, if we've noticed that you've had to wipe a few times, then you have the ability to press up on the d-pad to activate it for that checkpoint," says Paul. "Then with having the time bonuses, the score attack and the collectables you can look back at the end of a level and go, 'Oh, can I go back in there and do a bit better?'"

Battletoads launched in August 2020 to a positive reception – you can read our review on page 88. "We wanted to make a stupid game, and the internet is telling me I've made a stupid game," concludes AJ. What better accolade could you hope for? *

WHO'S WHO?

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE PRINCIPAL PLAYERS OF OUR DRAMA, FOR NEWCOMERS AND OLD HANDS ALIKE

ZITZ

The seemingly self-designated leader of the group is rather concerned with proving his skills in the role, which is worrying because he doesn't really have a handle on anything. Fortunately, he's also an agile combat expert with some awesome juggle combos and near-instant dodge speed.

RASH

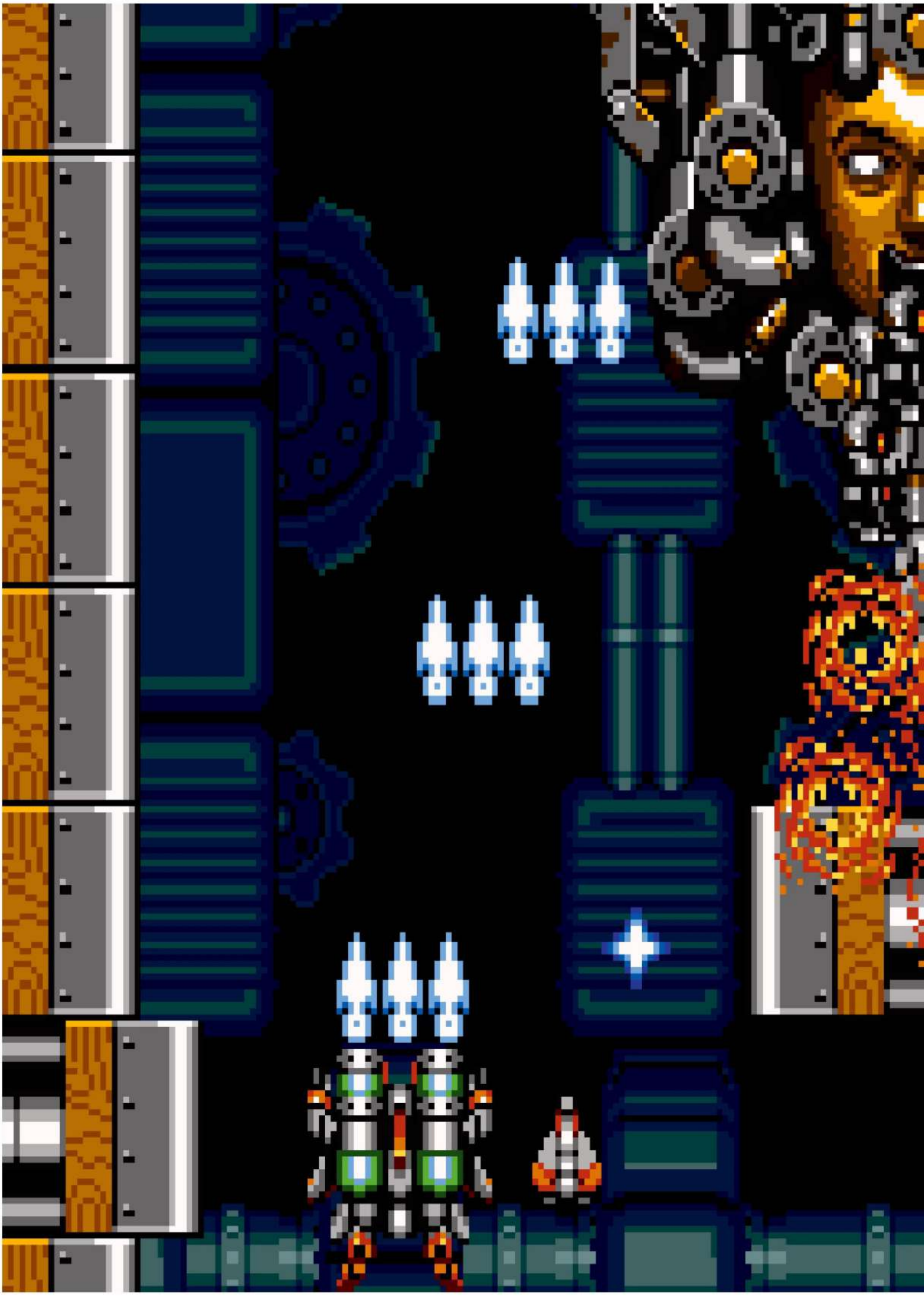
Of all the toads, Rash is the most obsessed with returning the group to its former glory. He's also the group's 'best kisser' (he practices on his hand 'all the time') and not averse to some gratuitous murder. In gameplay terms, he's the balanced choice – faster than Pimple and stronger than Zitz.

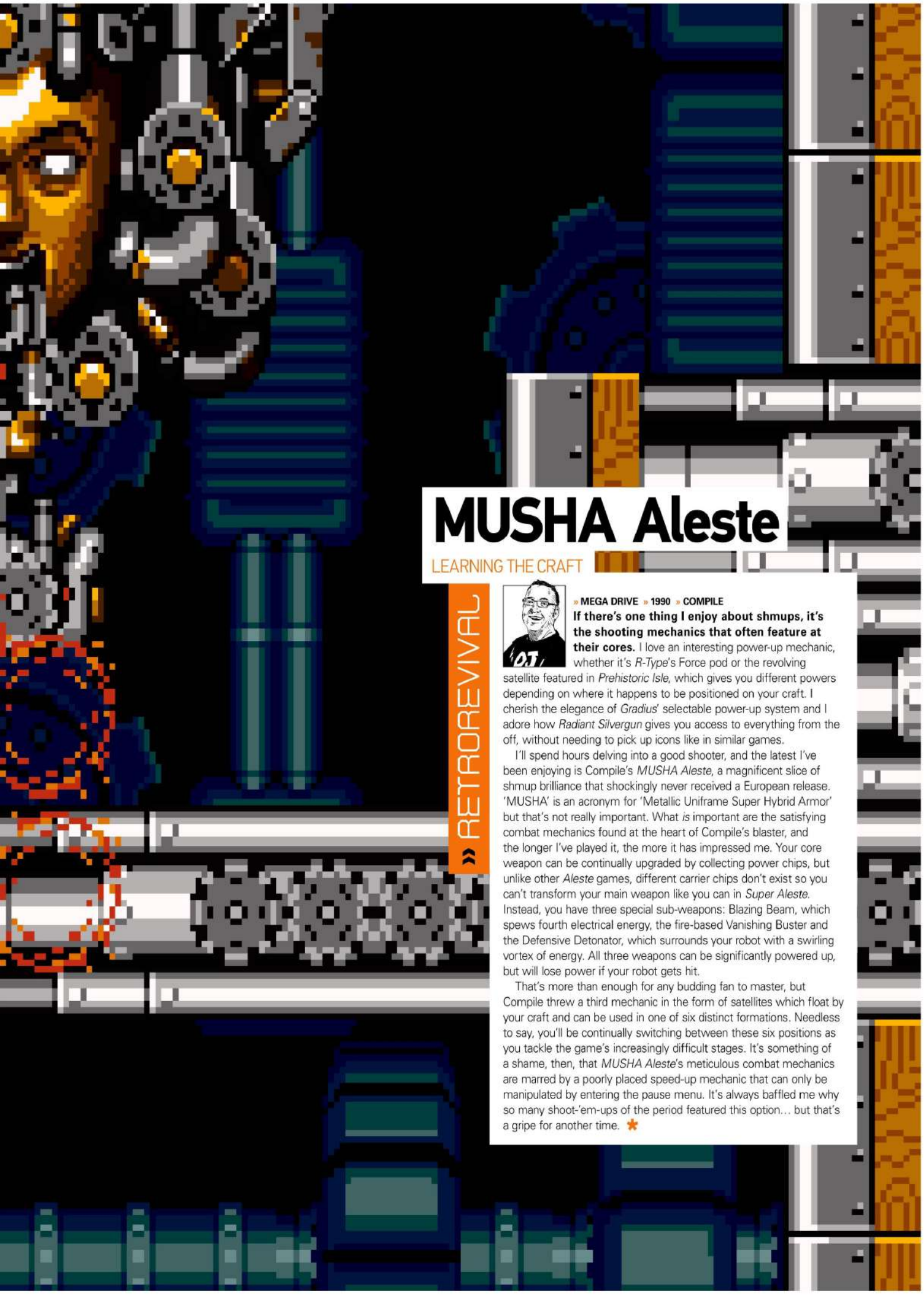
PIMPLE

Poor old Pimple tries to be the gentle giant, favouring calm and reasonable responses to the ridiculous situations he finds himself in. Of course, things sometimes get too much for him, causing him to snap – and since he's the heavy hitter of the group, that means pain for anything nearby.

THE DARK QUEEN

The former nemesis of the Battletoads is back, and has abandoned her old look for some Goth garb. Despite having seemingly dropped her hostility towards the toads, she tends to bring out their worst impulses surprisingly often. Could she be attempting to play the long game?





MUSHA Aleste

LEARNING THE CRAFT

» MEGA DRIVE » 1990 » COMPILE

If there's one thing I enjoy about shmups, it's the shooting mechanics that often feature at their cores. I love an interesting power-up mechanic, whether it's *R-Type*'s Force pod or the revolving satellite featured in *Prehistoric Isle*, which gives you different powers depending on where it happens to be positioned on your craft. I cherish the elegance of *Gradius*' selectable power-up system and I adore how *Radiant Silvergun* gives you access to everything from the off, without needing to pick up icons like in similar games.

I'll spend hours delving into a good shooter, and the latest I've been enjoying is Compile's *MUSHA Aleste*, a magnificent slice of shmup brilliance that shockingly never received a European release. 'MUSHA' is an acronym for 'Metallic Uniframe Super Hybrid Armor' but that's not really important. What *is* important are the satisfying combat mechanics found at the heart of Compile's blaster, and the longer I've played it, the more it has impressed me. Your core weapon can be continually upgraded by collecting power chips, but unlike other *Aleste* games, different carrier chips don't exist so you can't transform your main weapon like you can in *Super Aleste*. Instead, you have three special sub-weapons: Blazing Beam, which spews fourth electrical energy, the fire-based Vanishing Buster and the Defensive Detonator, which surrounds your robot with a swirling vortex of energy. All three weapons can be significantly powered up, but will lose power if your robot gets hit.

That's more than enough for any budding fan to master, but Compile threw a third mechanic in the form of satellites which float by your craft and can be used in one of six distinct formations. Needless to say, you'll be continually switching between these six positions as you tackle the game's increasingly difficult stages. It's something of a shame, then, that *MUSHA Aleste*'s meticulous combat mechanics are marred by a poorly placed speed-up mechanic that can only be manipulated by entering the pause menu. It's always baffled me why so many shoot-'em-ups of the period featured this option… but that's a gripe for another time. ✱

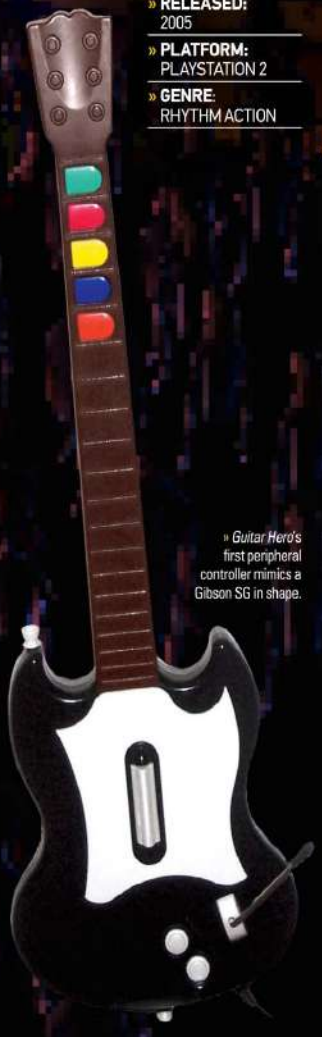
THE MAKING OF GUITAR HERO

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** REDOCTANE
- **DEVELOPER:** HARMONIX
- **RELEASED:** 2005
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2
- **GENRE:** RHYTHM ACTION

IF YOU PLAYED VIDEOGAMES IN THE NOUGHTIES, CHANCES ARE YOU OWNED A GUITAR HERO GAME. THE FIRST IN THE SERIES CELEBRATES ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR, BUT HOW DID HARMONIX CONVERT ICONIC ROCK SONGS INTO AN ACCESSIBLE GAMING EXPERIENCE?

WORDS BY ED NIGHTINGALE



» *Guitar Hero*'s first peripheral controller mimics a Gibson SG in shape.

Imagine for a second that you're part of one of the biggest rock bands on the planet and you receive a call from a little-known game developer asking to put your iconic song into a videogame played with a plastic toy guitar. Would you take that risk? This was the question posed by Harmonix in its pursuit of making the ultimate rock videogame: *Guitar Hero*. Released in November 2005 for the PS2 by Harmonix and RedOctane, it spawned a series of over 20 titles and expansions across multiple platforms in just five years.

The concept behind the game was simple yet hard to describe, so persuading bands to license their music was a tricky task. "We really wanted it to be a tour through all the genres of rock… to be true to the entire spectrum of rock music," says Greg LoPiccolo, project director for the game. The game's 30 main tracks were pared down from an initial list of 300, yet it still managed to include some of the most recognisable rock tracks in history.

There was at least precedence for this type of game, with the Japanese arcade game *Guitar Freaks* in which players strum along on a plastic guitar to rock and J-pop tunes. RedOctane contacted Harmonix, which had seen success with its previous music games, to create a westernised equivalent. Harmonix agreed, but only if it could focus solely on rock music.

"A bunch of us at the studio were rock musicians and really into rock and rock culture," says Greg. "So we thought that we could do it justice. We can crush this assignment, it's about rock-and-roll!"

What's perhaps most remarkable about *Guitar Hero*'s development is that it was created in under a year. With such a short lead time and a modest budget, Greg and his team had tight constraints. Yet with such a focused concept, the game stuck almost exactly to the original specification. "We knew what we wanted to do, RedOctane was an awesome partner, we had all the right people in the right roles," remembers Greg. "It went very smoothly."

What certainly helped was the studio's previous releases: *Frequency* and *Amplitude*. Both involve beat-matching along a moving pathway, setting the foundation for *Guitar Hero*. Key lessons were learned, such as how fast to move the 'gems', how big they needed to be, and what the UI would look like.

There was more to the tracklist than just contacting big names, however. "We knew that we wanted big, iconic guitar-driven songs that had variety in style and feel but all fit solidly into *Guitar Hero*'s focused rock aesthetic," says Eric Brosius, audio lead on the game. "What we didn't know was what made a great song a great *Guitar Hero* song and what was the range of difficulty we could expect players to handle."

The process began with a handful of test songs, with Eric and team recording their own versions of songs to play around with. This was

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DANCE CENTRAL
SYSTEM: XBOX 360
YEAR: 2010

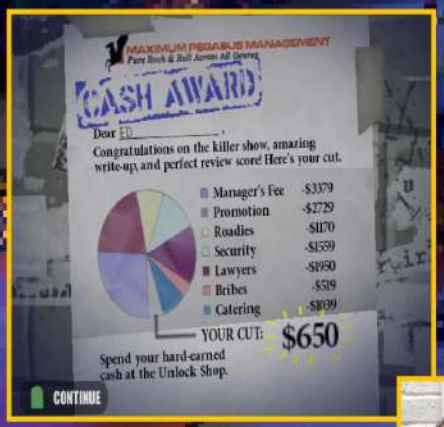
ROCK BAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2007

FREQUENCY
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2001

» [PS2] Lifting the peripheral's neck triggers Star Power – it never gets old!

CASH: $13300
OPEN
GUITARS
GIBSON LES PAUL SPECIAL
The original Gibson Les Paul left little room for improvement, but the combination of a double-cutaway body with the original carved-top design has been embraced by guitarists who want the ultimate combination of tradition and performance.
BUY ITEM
BACK
UP/DOWN

» [PS2] The shop is filled with guitars to unlock, based on classic models from Fender, Gibson and more.



» [PS2] Your band receives cash rewards after each song to spend in the shop on guitars, skins and bonus songs.

SELECT YOUR HERO
JOHNNY NAPALM
RAW IS THE WORD THAT DESCRIBES JOHNNY NAPALM BEST. THAT GOES FOR HIS GUITAR PLAYING AND HIS ABUSE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. HIS ENERGY ONSTAGE IS UNMATCHED. HE'S THE TRUE SUCCESSOR TO THE PUNK ERA AND AN AWESOME TALENT.
CONTINUE
BACK
UP/DOWN

» [PS2] The six main heroes are all subtly recognisable, from metal heads to punk rockers.

a vital first step. "These were a lot of fun to make but more importantly very useful to us in learning about what kind of guitar parts worked well, what was too easy or too hard," says Eric. "And also they helped give the team a more tangible idea of what the game might feel like to play."

That gave Eric confidence in his work. "I remember playing through and getting that feeling of excitement and being in the zone playing a song, forgetting that I'm playing a videogame," he says. "Then it clicked for me and I thought, 'Wow, if other people can feel this way too, this will be a big deal.'"

From there, the initial list of songs was prioritised using various metrics like genre and style, difficulty and how iconic a song is. This formed the basis for the licensing agent tasked with formally acquiring the necessary rights.

There was an extra hiccup, though. For the game to work, the audio team required the guitar tracks to be separate from the other instruments so the sound could drop in and out as the player strums. Record labels don't provide music in this way, so Harmonix enlisted the aid of production company WaveGroup to re-record the songs from scratch in the necessary format. "WaveGroup really did a fantastic job in nailing the production, the guitar tone and playing, and even the singers' voices," says Eric. "It was a big task and they did it really well."

A byproduct of the game's success was music discovery, something that the team expected somewhat. "[We did] our best to put something together that really introduces people to a spectrum of things," says Greg. "It worked much better than we thought it would. Some of those bands had a rebirth a little bit, based on their inclusion in one of the *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* games after that."

What's more, the audio team was able to include bonus tracks from smaller local bands, offering exposure on a potentially huge platform. The original tracks were also simpler to acquire. "Because we personally knew these bands, it was easy to get them on board without burdening our licensing agent who was plenty busy trying to secure the main songs for the soundtrack," says Eric. "It then sort of became a tradition at Harmonix to include bonus songs like this in many of our games."

Between Harmonix and RedOctane, the guitar peripheral went through multiple iterations, ▶

GREG LOPICCOLO

■ Greg was the project director for *Guitar Hero* and was the bassist for indie rock band Tribe.

STRUMMING SCORCHERS

LICKS, SHREDS AND AXE-GRINDERS

I LOVE ROCK & ROLL

JOAN JETT & THE BLACKHEARTS

■ Sitting right at the top of the tracklist, *I Love Rock & Roll* is likely the first song you'll play. Immediately, you're hit with a punchy, recognisable riff that's simple enough to settle into, followed by long held chords which are perfect for some whammy bar waggling before hitting the Star Power like a rock god.

IRON MAN

BLACK SABBATH

■ Amping up the difficulty a little, *Iron Man* is a great introduction to hammer-ons and pull-offs with its slinky main riff, a stomping middle eight and a guitar solo that's just on the right side of tricky – even on Expert difficulty.

GODZILLA

BLUE ÖYSTER CULT

■ With opening chords that stomp harder than the great lizard himself, followed by some fun bluesy noodling moments to put your fingers to work, this track from Blue Öyster Cult offers a mix of both rhythm and melody. The real definition of lead guitar.

EVEN RATS

THE SLIP

■ Hidden away amongst the bonus tracks is this soft-rock gem from Boston's *The Slip* that makes for a nice palette cleanser after all that thrashing. It begins as a gentle cooldown, but the extended singalong outro is an earworm that'll make you feel like a stadium star.

BARK AT THE MOON

OZZY OSBOURNE

■ Though not the hardest track in the game (that's arguably Pantera's *Cowboys From Hell*), Ozzy Osbourne's *Bark At The Moon* is the grand finale. From its driving opening chords, to its satisfyingly varied riffs and its howling solo, nailing this will make you feel like a true *Guitar Hero*.

HERO vs FREAKS BATTLE OF THE BANDS: GAMING EDITION

PERIPHERAL

With its angular, futuristic design, the *Guitar Freaks* guitar looks more like a gaming peripheral than an instrument. Upping the buttons from three to five and inspired by the classic Gibson SG guitar, *Guitar Hero* certainly has the more authentic controller.

GAME MECHANICS

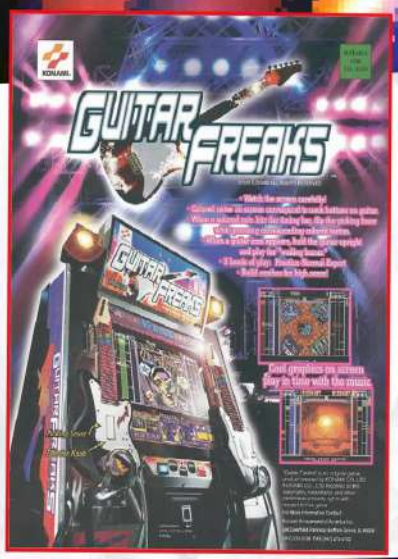
As part of Konami's Bemani music games, *Guitar Freaks* is similar to the likes of *Beatmania* and *DDR*, with notes slowly rising to the top as you strum in time with the melody. *Guitar Hero* works similarly but with downward falling notes and more complex left-hand patterns.

SONG VARIETY

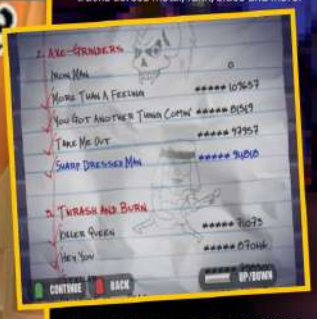
Guitar Freaks excels in its tight tracklist, with a variety of rock, pop, blues and J-pop songs to choose from. *Guitar Hero*, though, gives you a history of western rock music with classics from every rock genre and recognisable bands and artists – even if they're not the original recordings.

EXPANSIONS

Guitar Freaks slowly evolved over time, adding expansions and refined peripherals to its games. Sadly these are rarely available outside of Japan. *Guitar Hero* took over in the west, spawning sequels, expansions and incorporating big rock-and-roll superstars.



» [PS2] The setlist provides a history of iconic tracks across metal, funk, blues and more.



» [PS2] The loading screens poke fun at rock cliches and always raise a chuckle.

» [PS2] The venues you perform in get steadily more outlandish, from tiny venues to festivals.

» [PS2] The nods to real media add colour to the career mode as you progress from small-town band to festival headliners.

> "WE DIDN'T WANT PEOPLE GETTING STUCK OR FRUSTRATED BECAUSE IT SUDDENLY BECAME TOO HARD, NOR DID WE WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL LIKE THEY WEREN'T PROGRESSING"
> **ERIC BROSIUS**

with guitar size, price and the ability to play lefty or righty all key considerations. Most important of all was the left hand button positioning: their height, their travel, their click-feel. Imported *Guitar Freaks* guitars were used as a test, but a more authentic shape and a commitment to five buttons were eventually chosen to allow for a shift in the left hand just like playing a real guitar. The Harmonix team also lobbied heavily for the whammy bar to bend pitch – an expensive addition that certainly added to the fun of playing the game.

An even more iterative process, though, was designing the left-hand patterns to ensure a balance of difficulty and authenticity. Eric and the team created informal guidelines, such as which button combinations feel most like power chords, and how to break up long melodic phrases with more notes than buttons. "I remember learning how to play a lot of these songs on my real guitar to help compare the feeling of playing it for real to playing it within the game," remembers Eric. Having so many guitarists on the team provided expertise to get the right feel, and the result was a happy medium between simple beat matching and authenticity.

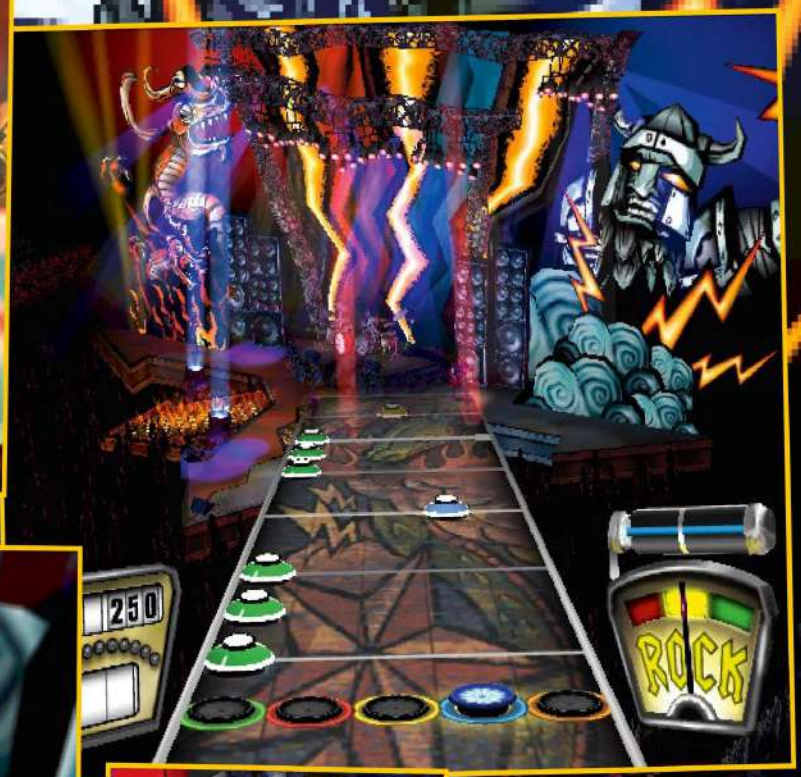
Those guidelines additionally helped establish the two axes of difficulty: the order the songs were presented and the four difficulty levels for each. "We tried hard to make sure that the difficulty always increased evenly and at the right pace," says Eric. "We didn't want people getting stuck or frustrated because it suddenly became too hard, nor did we want people to feel like they weren't progressing."

The best way to do this was to work backwards. "One of the things we figured out was to start with Expert and try to get it to match the contours of the music in as much detail as we could and then simplify for each successive drop down," says Greg.

Along with the tracklist's rock history vibe, the visuals encompass various rock styles. From the player characters, to the menus and the loading screens, rock cliches were very much leaned into. This was proposed by art director Ryan Lesser, with the cartoon aesthetic a result of platform limitations. "Doing photorealism

» [PS2] Making it through a tricky song is always satisfying. You rock!

» [PS2] Nailing a wailing solo is a real workout for your fingers, but it feels great to hit a long string of notes.



» [PS2] What could be more metal than dragons, Vikings and lightning bolts?

» [PS2] Initiating Star Power doubles your score multiplier, better time it right!

on a PS2 with all the other stuff we were doing was out of the question," says Greg. "And so he brought to us this sense of, 'Let's have giant stacks of amps but they're asymmetrical and toppling over...' and we let him roll with that and it came out great!"

So what were the team's expectations for *Guitar Hero*? "We hoped it would do okay!" says Greg. "At that point, our goal was to develop games that were successful enough to justify sequels. We were basically making payroll, trying to keep the company afloat. I think we had this overarching belief that music gaming could be a big category. If we could find the right formula, it would be very entertaining and people would like it."

They certainly did. The game's success not only generated millions of dollars, but snowballed into a whole movement of music videogames that transformed Harmonix from a small developer to a major player. Though the Sony-published *Singstar* released the year before, the *Guitar Hero* brand inspired multiple successors: *DJ Hero*, *Rock Band*, *Rocksmith* and many more. That is, until the genre reached saturation point and plummeted in popularity.

The genre's drop-off came as a surprise to Greg, who envisioned indies picking up where Harmonix left off. Yet a lack of player creativity stunted growth. As Greg notes, "There was a limit as to how much time people were willing to spend getting really good at pretending to play other people's music... But it never really turned into a viable genre and I think that's because there was a design bottleneck.

"That's the problem with music, as a musician it's hard to get good enough to have [a rock star] experience on a conventional instrument," Greg continues. "You have to put years of effort into it and for a lot of people that's not possible for them. A lot of people don't get there. And that was the cool thing about *Guitar Hero*, you could get there in a weekend."

Eric also acknowledges the limits of the genre: "*Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* are very skill-based games that come with a great vibe and atmosphere, but are at heart very score-oriented." That's why Harmonix has more moved towards exploring creative expression, for example with its forthcoming *Fuser*. "We'd like to give non-musicians that thrill of creating music, not just performing music, in a game format," says Eric. "It's a challenge, but one we're excited to work on."

Even though the future of music games is moving in a more creative direction, the legacy of *Guitar Hero* is far more than plastic instruments in your attic. What struck a chord with Greg was the illusion of making music. "Even people who don't have musical skills have a desire to have a musical experience that's immersive and good enough to have them feel engaged with the music," he says. "That's the thing we did well that made it successful, was it gave you the illusion that you were playing, you really felt like you were generating music."

With its iconic tracklist, innovative peripheral and tongue-in-cheek aesthetic, *Guitar Hero* truly offered the fantasy of being a rockstar. ✱

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

Info

- **System:** PC, Xbox One, PS4, PS3
- **Year:** 2015
- **Publisher:** Sega
- **Developer:** Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio
- **Key People:** Masayoshi Yokoyama (producer, writer), Mitsuhiro Shimano (producer), Kazuki Hosokawa (director)

Go Deeper

» With 1.8 million Japanese characters in the original script, as well as unfamiliar board games, localising *Yakuza 0* was a mammoth task that took over 18 months.

» Since *Yakuza 0* was built on the same engine as *Yakuza 5*, a PlayStation 3 version of the game was created. However, this version was only released in Asian countries.

» [PC] Multi-man brawls are a staple of the *Yakuza* series, and you'll enjoy plenty of them in this prequel.

Despite popularity in its homeland, the west never truly embraced the Yakuza series until this Eighties-themed prequel came along. We take a look at how the series finally made its international breakthrough

Words by Nick Thorpe

YAKUZA 0

THE BACKGROUND

With the *Yakuza* series achieving consistently excellent sales in Japan across five main games and an equal number of spin-offs, there was practically no question that a mainline instalment would be made for the PlayStation 4. When it was finally revealed in 2014, players learnt that it would be set in the late Eighties, focusing on the series' long-term protagonist Kazuma Kiryu and perennial fan favourite Goro Majima. This was a first for the series – while there had been two spin-offs set in ancient Japan, this look back to the 'bubble era' was the first proper *Yakuza* prequel.

Outside of Japan, the series' future was not so assured. Between questionable localisation choices and poor timing, the first three games had only amassed a small following, and 2012's zombie apocalypse spin-off *Yakuza: Dead Souls* did so badly that it took a Sony partnership for Sega to localise *Yakuza 5* – and even then, it was a digital-only release, three years after the Japanese launch. *Yakuza 0* was therefore something of a gamble, but Sega committed to the game, delivering a high-quality localisation with no cuts and a full retail release. This time, the publisher's faith was rewarded – strong reviews and word of mouth praise made the PS4 version a hit in 2017, and the game was ported to PC in 2018 and Xbox One in 2020.

THE GAME

Yakuza 0 allows you to play as two low-ranking Tojo Clan gangsters, both of whom find themselves in trouble. In Tokyo, Kazuma Kiryu performs a routine debt collection job, only to find himself suspected of murder and kicked out of the Dojima Family after the debtor is found dead. Meanwhile, disgraced yakuza Goro Majima is given the chance to regain his place in the Shimano Family by performing a hit, only to reconsider when he meets his designated target. Over the course of the game, you'll alternate between controlling both men, and discover how the pair are tied up in a much larger struggle for power in the criminal underworld.

» [PS4] Daisaku Kuze is a constant thorn in Kiryu's side and a recurring boss throughout the game.

» [PS4] A kettle full of boiling water to the face? Ouch! *Yakuza 0*'s innovative violence is both brutal and hilarious.

» [PC] Look, we weren't lying when we said you meet some *really* weird characters in this game.

» [PC] Seeing Majima and Kiryu don full Eighties music video garb during karaoke scenes is worth the price of admission alone.

Things of note

ARCADE ACTION

Amongst the minigames on offer in *Yakuza 0* are four of Sega's arcade classics from the Eighties – *Out Run*, *Space Harrier*, *Fantasy Zone* and *Super Hang-On*.

MR SHAKEDOWN

New to *Yakuza 0* are these heavy-duty thugs, who wander about the city looking to steal your cash – but it works both ways, if you can best them.

VCPD WHO?

During a shootout sequence, the targets that let you know when enemies will fire has been lifted from the *Virtua Cop* series, making for a neat retro throwback.

BACK ISSUES

Yakuza 0 features plenty of cool era-appropriate details, but we particularly like the selection of old magazines, including the likes of *Famitsu* and *Shonen Champion*.

CELEBRITY CAMEOS

In keeping with the shady themes of the *Yakuza* series, a number of the women you can recruit in the hostess club minigame are depictions of real-world porn actresses.

For the most part, this involves running around cities, tracking leads to find out what your next move is and getting into fights. These brawls can range from small scuffles to epic encounters with dozens of enemies, as well as one-on-one boss fights. What makes these scenes so satisfying is the brutality on offer – everything you can do to an enemy in *Yakuza 0* looks and feels like it *hurts*, and both Kiryu and Majima have three distinct fighting styles allowing them to trade off between speed and power. If you're ever in need of something to even the odds, you can grab the nearest bike, traffic cone or even kettle and use it as a weapon.

Of course, you can also choose to pursue sidequests instead, and this is where the game's less serious side shines. You'll encounter some truly bizarre situations, from fairly sweet ones like Majima trying to win toys for a lonely little girl to distinctly muckier ones, such as the dominatrix who asks Kiryu to teach her how to punish people. From indomitable old ladies to public toilet graffiti artists, and from government officials to early mobile phone adopters, plenty of people out there need some help from their friendly neighbourhood gangsters.

But if you're not feeling so altruistic, there are plenty of other ways to amuse yourself. Kamurocho and Sotenbori, the fictionalised versions of Tokyo's Kabukicho and Osaka's Dotonbori, aren't huge environments but they're densely packed with minigames and other things to do. If you wander into an arcade, you can play a game or two and try to win toys from the UFO Catcher. If you're more into sports, you can bowl or try to hit a home run at the batting centre. You can play pub games, you can gamble, you can even try traditional board games like Shogi and Mahjong. And if you're feeling really wild, let loose at the disco or a karaoke bar for some truly unforgettable scenes.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

The fact that *Yakuza 0* is a prequel works in its favour, as it's awash with a drenching of Eighties nostalgia which will doubtless go down well with **Retro Gamer** fans. More importantly, it allows a fresh start to the story, which is valuable now that the series is so large and its plot so convoluted. It's great for existing fans to see Kiryu's early days and get some insight into Majima, with plenty more enjoyable nods to later games to boot, but newcomers won't feel left out of the loop either.

Beyond the plot, *Yakuza 0* delivers everything the series has long been known for. Satisfying brawls, meaty plots and a wealth of distractions are all present, and due to the fact that the engine was rebuilt from the ground up for *Yakuza 6*, this prequel represents the ultimate evolution of the series' original style, with more to see and do than the other games in the series. If you want the perfect entry point into what is one of today's premier action-adventure series, *Yakuza 0* is it. ✱

Dan Kitchen

What cherished games would you take to the island?

In a career stretching across four decades, Dan Kitchen has worked on over 180 games, as a coder, designer and producer. Join us on a journey from the Atari 2600 to the Xbox and back again

Words by Paul Drury

With such a staggering number of titles to his name, we have taken inspiration from Jacques' 'seven ages of man' speech in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to discuss Dan Kitchen's gigantic back catalogue. Here, we present the 'seven ages of Dan'…

We begin with the age of the infant. Dan was born and raised in New Jersey, USA, and spent his formative years surrounded by technology. His father loved tinkering with electronics, and in the late Sixties, his older brother Steve constructed a desk-sized computer from component parts in their basement. "He's the one who got me interested in electronics," says Dan. "After high school, I was all set to go to university but Steve had gone to work for a local company, Wickstead Design Associates, making electronic gadgets for cars. They got into making toys and games and my other brother Garry ended up working there, too."

Garry created the hugely popular handheld game *Bank Shot* for Parker Brothers, and in 1979 Dan joined his siblings at the company. "How could I not," smiles Dan. "I loved them both. The age difference negated any rivalry. I looked up to them."

The second age of man is the whining schoolboy, reluctantly dragging himself to class, but Dan's enthusiasm for electronics and programming made him a very willing student. He collaborated with Garry on the handheld LED pinball game *Wildfire*, released in 1979, and in the same year, he acquired an Apple II. "I was a big fan of *Microsoft Adventure* and all of Scott Adams' games," he grins. "I fell in love with text adventures instantly and knew I wanted to make my own."

By this time, Steve had departed from Wickstead and moved west, and with their eldest brother gone, Garry and Dan decided to set up their own company, ISS (Imaginative Systems Software). They secured a contract with Hayden Software, a local book publisher wanting a slice of the growing computer games market, to write six Apple II games. Having taught himself assembly language, Dan released his first text adventure, *Crystal Caverns*, in 1982, earning the tidy sum of $6,000 for his efforts. The game was a fairly traditional treasure hunt set beneath a spooky mansion, but for his second title Dan cast the player as private investigator Al Clubs, grandson of 'a famous detective of another era and another suit', on the trail of an abducted heiress.

"The idea for *Crime Stopper* came from one of my brother's friends, Barry Marx, a writer and a brilliant chap. He suggested he write the story and I would make it interactive using my *Crystal Caverns* engine. And he's responsible for the Sam Spade pun," Dan assures us.

As Dan created his adventure games, his brother Garry sat on an adjacent desk in their basement studio, also using an Apple II but, having exploited the open architecture of the machine, he was using it to code games not for home computers but for consoles. The brothers were about to play with the big boys.

And so we come to the age of the lover. Dan's great paramour was the Atari 2600, but in 1981 it was hard for anyone outside Atari and the newly formed Activision to even get a first date with the wood-veneered beauty.

"I was only able to code for the 2600 because Garry reverse-engineered the machine and created a 4K board we could plug into a slot at the back of the Apple II," he explains. "Garry wrote the game *Space Jockey* [published by US Games] and then got the deal to convert *Donkey Kong*. Once I'd finished *Crime Stopper*, I started learning about coding for the 2600 and began to make a game with flowerpots and called it *Flower Power*…"

It was the seed of an idea which would eventually grow into *Crackpots*, his first 2600 game (see **RG203** for ▶

Trivia

Dan once met Tom Hanks on the moon… that is, the lunar set of IMAX movie *Magnificent Desolation: Walking On The Moon 3D*. The proposed spin-off game sadly never came to fruition.

Dan (left) and Garry in 1969. They already had a homemade computer in their basement built by elder brother Steve.

FIRST JOB
Cashier at a convenience store

CURRENT JOB
President and CEO of Tiki Interactive

FAVOURITE FILM
The Big Lebowski

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Quiet Village: The Exotic Sounds of Martin Denny

FAVOURITE BOOK:
Treasure Island

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Apple II

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Atari 2600

BESTSELLING PRODUCT:
Frogger for the Game Boy. It sold almost 5 million copies

BEST HOLIDAY
In 1993 I was working on the Disney game *Goofy's Hysterical History Tour* and was invited to attend the Disney Licensing Expo in Orlando, Florida. That was great!

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My love Carolyn, of course

212-068105103032068117103

SEX
M

NAME
Dan Kitchen

YEAR OF BIRTH
????

PLACE OF BIRTH
Teaneck, New Jersey

BIOGRAPHY
Dan coded Atari 2600/VCS games for Activision and founded development studio Imagineering and Absolute Entertainment with his brother Garry.

"We had a photo of the four Activision founders with our faces drawn over theirs. We would say, 'One day, we will be those guys'"
Dan Kitchen

Praise For Dan

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Dan Kitchen's work...

Darran Jones
I've played a lot of Dan's games, particularly *Crackpots* and *River Raid II*, but the best surprise from reading this article is knowing that he was involved with *Jaws Unleashed*. I own this on the Xbox and it's always been a favourite of mine, so I know someone else to contact now for my planned article.

Paul Drury
I had the pleasure of meeting Dan at the Free Play Florida pinball and videogame show in 2019 and was struck by his warmth, candour and taste in Hawaiian shirts. He has had a hand in more games than anyone I've interviewed over the last 16 years and he hasn't stopped making them yet.

▶ the full 'Making Of' article), but first Dan and Garry – who had been joined at ISS by Garry's brother-in-law, Kevin Calcutt, and John Van Ryzin – were courted by both Atari and Activision. "We visited Atari first and walked through the lab where games were being developed," Dan recalls. "Garry and I were talking about our skillset and how we'd like to be credited for our work. The guy showing us around said, 'Credited? I could get towel designers to do what you do.'"

They returned to New Jersey disheartened, but the next week they were flown out to Activision's HQ in California and had a very different experience. "I remember the only other person on the upper deck of the plane was Marty Feldman," chuckles Dan. "They wined and dined us. We were already enamoured by Activision before we visited them. We actually had a photo of the four founders up on our wall at ISS with our faces drawn over theirs. Garry would say, 'One day, we will be those guys."

And now, they were. Sort of. They joined Activision but rather than move to the West Coast, they became the company's East Coast design division, staying in New Jersey, deliberately kept separate from the original quartet of game creators in California, with the hope they would bring a different perspective to making 2600 titles. They were installed in a plush office and paid handsomely – Dan's starting salary in 1981 was $17,000 with a bonus of up to $30,000. "We felt like we had arrived," beams Dan. "We were given the freedom to create. It was like *The Beatles*, the four of us coming together, like a band. It was a magical time."

> "I fell in love with text adventures instantly and knew I wanted to make my own"
> Dan Kitchen

The fab four produced some magical games, including Dan's aforementioned *Crackpots*, Garry's *Keystone Kapers* and the brilliant *HERO* by John Van Ryzin, until the infamous videogame crash in the US broke the spell.

The fourth age of man is the soldier and Dan was on the frontline during the 2600 civil war, which would see the superpowers of Atari and Activision attacked from all sides. "My brother saw it coming," sighs Dan. "One evening in 1983, Garry and I stopped off at a Video Shack store. We often did to see how our games were doing, and we saw a game not by Atari or Activision. It was *Skeet Shoot* by Games By Apollo. Garry looked at the screenshot on the box and said, 'The industry is dead.' He knew that if people could make games for the 2600 but with no willingness to make them good, everyone would jump in and flood the market with poorly designed games. And he was right."

The influx of substandard titles, as well as some questionable financial decisions by the management at Atari, led to a collapse in confidence in the whole console business. All was not lost, however. The home computer market remained largely unaffected, so Activision redirected its developers to produce games for an array of home micros. Dan stopped work on the sequel to *Keystone Kapers* and began working on a number of Commodore 64 titles, including *The Rocky Horror Show*. Did he go full 'method coder' and program in fishnet stockings and a basque, we wonder?

"Almost," he smirks. "I loved the Commodore 64. I was one of many programmers on that game. It had actually been designed in England but I coded here in New Jersey and I was pleased with how it came out. Though I still can't do the Time Warp."

By 1986, it was time for the Kitchen boys to do a jump to the left. Activision closed its East Coast division and with their hand rather forced, the brothers established their own game development studio, Imagineering. "Frankly, we were happy to leave," says Dan. "It wasn't the same Activision and we'd become disillusioned with it. The NES was out and we didn't think they were focusing on the right areas. We were itching to do our own thing."

So we arrive at the age of the justice, characterised by wisdom and experience, and the brothers applied both to

Dan (left) and Garry tinker with MANIAC, the computer built by eldest brother Steve, in a feature from Enter magazine, June 1984.

Kung-Fu Master brought feet of fury to the Atari 7800.

Dan on the beach in 1982, when Activision sent all their employees and partners on a week-long vacation to Maui. We miss the Eighties.

Timeline

1983 | 1985 | 1988 | 1989

CRACKPOTS
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **FORMAT:** Atari 2600
Dan's 2600 debut was this excellent Activision-produced title, which tasks you with defending a building from swarms of sewer bugs through judicious plant pot-pushing.

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
■ **YEAR:** 1985
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Playing as either Brad or Janet, this collect-'em-up has you wandering round Frank-N-Furter's kooky mansion, piecing together the De-Medusa in minimal clothing.

RIVER RAID II
■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **FORMAT:** Atari 2600
Dan designed this follow-up to Carol Shaw's seminal shooter, expanding the levels, adding in new enemies and allowing you to alter your altitude.

TOMCAT: THE F-14 FIGHTER SIMULATOR
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **FORMAT:** Atari 7800
Dan worked on many flight sims, most with some element of combat, and he is especially proud of this one, which was prefixed with his name.

Though Penn And Teller: Smoke And Mirrors was never released, it has gained a cult status, mainly for the Desert Bus eight-hour minigame.

Double Dragon's battling brothers were not modelled on Dan and Garry Kitchen.

Games On Film

Dan was accustomed to turning films into videogames, but in 2006 his games actually featured on the big screen. "I got a call from Sony one day, saying they had a film coming out about videogames and could we help them," he explains. "It was *Grandma's Boy*, produced by Adam Sandler. I'd got a game called *Demonik* in development, which I thought would be great to centre the film around. I told them I'd been in the business over 20 years, so if they wanted a videogame studio to look right, I could help!" Dan assisted with the set design as well as delivering the brilliantly titled *Eternal Death Slayer 3*, which shines in a film that combines the subtle wit of *American Pie* with the artistic vision of *Joysticks*.

their new venture. Dan worked on such games as *Destroyer Escort*, *Flight Of The Intruder* and the Apple II conversion of *Little Computer People* for a variety of publishers, including his former employer. He also collaborated with his sibling on Garry Kitchen's GameMaker, helping with the bulk of the demos that came with the package to showcase its potential. "It was such a brilliant tool," enthuses Dan. "I used it to convert Dave Crane's *Pitfall!* for the C64 in just two weeks. You could do amazing things with it! As I was producing the demos, I would say, 'Hey Garry, can I have an instruction that does this?' and he'd add in new tools to give you more power."

Imagineering built up a strong relationship with Nintendo, producing many titles for the NES and later the SNES, including a string of *Simpsons* games. "We were big fans of the show," says Dan. "Matt Groening would send us reference material and it was all very exciting. Games like *Bart Vs The Space Mutants* and *Bart Vs The World* were so big, we each took a world or two to code, and I liked putting Bart in fantasy places, like on a pirate ship or in Ancient Egypt. We were given a lot of creative freedom."

From the late Eighties right through to the mid-Nineties, Dan worked on an array of licensed games, from *Ren & Stimpy* to *Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes*. His approach was always to immerse himself in the source material, once spending ten hours straight watching *Rocky & Bullwinkle* cartoons in preparation for a Game Boy title, and endeavoured to include little 'Easter eggs' for fans of the show. Did he ever worry that a licence might not actually provide a viable videogame scenario, we ask?

"Oh yeah – *Home Improvement*," he laughs, rolling his eyes. "We got a deal to do a *Goofy* game for the Sega Genesis, and after that, Disney started showing us other licences they had and one of those was *Home Improvement*. It was going for a song! It was a hit ▶

Kitchen On Kitchen

Dan picks his three favourite projects

CRACKPOTS

"*Crackpots* was my first Atari 2600 game for Activision. Playing it brings me back to those early days, which were the best times of my career."

CRYSTAL CAVERNS

"My first published game. I love playing text adventure games because they transport you to another world created completely by your imagination."

CRIME STOPPER

"I worked with a professional writer to create the storyline. I've always loved mysteries and many of the detective films from the Forties."

1991 1994 1998 2020

BART VS THE SPACE MUTANTS
■ **YEAR:** 1991
■ **FORMAT:** NES
Yellow was the new black in the Nineties and Dan tapped into *Simpsons* mania with a string of tie-in titles, starting with this tough side-scroller.

HOME IMPROVEMENT
■ **YEAR:** 1994
■ **FORMAT:** SNES
Proving you could make a game from pretty much any licence, this uses Tim Allen's popular sitcom as the basis for some solid platforming with added power tools.

FROGGER
■ **YEAR:** 1998
■ **FORMAT:** Game Boy
Gamers never tire of asking why the frog crossed the road and this fine handheld version sold millions. We shall be talking to prolific coder Dave Lubar in a future **RG**.

GOLD RUSH
■ **YEAR:** 2020
■ **FORMAT:** Atari 2600
Though the title had to be changed for copyright reasons, this is essentially *Keystone Kapers Kannonball*, the game Dan began back in 1983. Look out for the Kickstarter!

Taxi Driver on the PlayStation 2: "You looking at me?"

Readers' Questions

RetroBob: Tell us some Penn and Teller stories!
They were wonderful chaps. I remember one meeting when Penn said, 'I want to make the most boring videogame ever. You're driving a bus from Tucson, Arizona to Las Vegas in real time. Can you guys do that?' And so the minigame *Desert Bus* was born. Fucking brilliant! The game was finished but never got released. I asked them in 2015 if I could release it on mobile to mark the 20th anniversary, and we talked for six months until Penn and Teller said they liked the fact it was underground and off the radar.

Merman: What was your worst experience of 'crunch' to get a game finished?
***Ghostbusters* for the Atari 2600. I had to write that game in 12 weeks from beginning to end. I was almost hospitalised at the end I was so exhausted. I got mono and was totally wiped out… but I did it!**

Cafeman: What do you think is missing from today's popular console games, if anything?
The ability to plug in and play. With modern games, you've always got load times. Gameplay-wise, in some cases it can feel like you're playing prerendered movies. Your character has beautiful animation but then you have to stop and press a button for them to perform an action and that can disconnect the player.

Learnedrobb: Of all the systems you worked on, which do you feel forced you to be most creative?
Definitely the Atari 2600. I had no graphic chip, minimal memory, nothing to help me control what is on-screen, just the television raster and some registers.

FGasking: Any games that you worked on that were pretty much finished but never got released?
***Hyper Space Delivery Boy*. It was an incredible adventure game full of such detail. John Romero created it with Tom Hall and it has so much love built into it. They created a GBA version of it for us but the retailers said they couldn't sell it so it never got released, which was sad because it was such fun.**

> "Martin Scorsese said, 'If you go ahead with the Taxi Driver game, I'll make sure you never license another fucking movie again"
> Dan Kitchen

▶ TV show and they wanted to expand the brand. I codesigned [the game]. We met Tim Allen and the team on the set, and of course, it was a Hollywood sound stage – so any other sound stage could be right next door…"

Dan's ingenious approach meant players could dispatch dinosaurs and mummies with blowtorches and staple guns in a game described as, '*Pitfall!* with power tools'. He took a similarly imaginative approach to tie-in games as diverse as *Casper The Interactive Adventure* and *Kristi Yamaguchi Fantasy Ice Skating*, and his ability to secure big-name licences would prepare him for the new millennium.

Now we step into the age of the pantaloon. No, this is not the age when men wear ridiculous trousers. In commedia dell'arte, a popular form of theatre in the 16th century, the 'pantaloon' is a principal character, synonymous with wealth and status. And money was certainly coming Dan's way. "In the late Nineties, I was introduced to Majesco, a little company that needed games," he recalls. "Morris Sutton, the founder and CEO, had found a niche remaking old titles at a budget price. He asked me if I knew the game *Frogger*. I replied, 'Sure, I love it.' He said, 'Here's £100,000. Make it for the Game Boy. And do you know this game…?' By the time I walked out of there, I had a deal worth half a million dollars to write five games. He literally threw money at me."

Dan put his team together, which included old Imagineering employees such as Dave Lubar, and delivered the quintet in six months. That was enough to get him hired as VP of handheld development for Majesco and he oversaw a myriad titles across both Nintendo and Sony handhelds, including many old Atari titles via a deal with Hasbro. "In that first year, we brought in around $22 million dollars in revenue. I made Morris a disgusting amount of money."

If you needed more evidence that Dan was at the top table when it came to videogame deals, listen to his tale of licensing *Taxi Driver* for the PS2. "We'd paid $250,000 for the licence and paid the developers $1.25 million upfront to get the game completed. The game was about three quarters complete when I get a call from Sony telling me we had a problem. I asked what the issue was and they replied, 'Marty doesn't want you to do the game.' I was like, 'Marty who… wait, you mean Martin Scorsese? Holy shit!' I reminded them we'd already paid out $1.5 million on this game and we couldn't just kill it. They said, 'Marty says if you go ahead, he'll make sure you never licence another fucking movie again.' We cancelled it. Just like that. And I'd spent the last six months securing a deal to get Robert De Niro to do the voiceover for Travis Bickle, too!"

Though Shakespeare views the final age of man as a descent into senility, Dan has managed to revisit his childhood with his cognitive abilities intact. Spurred on by the discovery of the prototype of his unfinished sequel to *Keystone Kapers* in his off-site storage facility, he decided to rewrite the game from scratch and plans a Kickstarter campaign to facilitate a physical release of the game later this year. "It's a better game now than it was back in 1983 because I'm a better coder now," he grins. "It was the game I started after *Crackpots* and I did seven more VCS games after that. I've learned a lot more."

The process has rekindled his love for developing for the Atari 2600 and Dan has already begun a second game. "I was sitting in a tiki bar in California and I thought, 'What kind of game would Steve Cartwright do?' I've always admired his games, like *Barnstorming*, and I love those Cunard posters of transatlantic liners. I imagined the Activision rainbow coming out of the smokestacks as you cross the ocean from New York to Southampton, dodging icebergs and picking up shipwrecked stragglers. The title came to me in an instant – *Bon Voyage*!"

Long may your journey continue, Dan. ✱

Trivia

Dan's paternal grandparents were English and he is a distant relative of our most famous army recruiter, Lord Kitchener. "If Trump gets re-elected, will you ask the queen if she'll please take me back?" he pleads.

Dan's Desert Island Disks

The games that Dan simply couldn't live without

01 Microsoft Adventure (APPLE II)

I bought this game in 1979 and instantly fell in love with it. It was a faithful version of the original *Colossal Cave* text adventure written on a PDP-11 by William Crowther and Don Woods.

02 Crystal Caverns (APPLE II)

This was my first published game, a full sentence-recognition text adventure. I designed it after the original PDP-11 adventure, *Colossal Cave*. I'm very proud of the amount of depth I put into the game. The worlds I created in this and in *Crime Stopper* are complex and full of challenges which I've always enjoyed replaying.

03 Crime Stopper (APPLE II)

Like *Crystal Caverns*, *Crime Stopper* was another full sentence-recognition text adventure and also one of my favourites. It was my second published game, and for this one I worked with a professional writer who created a Forties film-noir-style story.

04 Seaquest (ATARI 2600)

Seaquest is special to me because it's one of the best shooters on the Atari 2600. Not only have I always loved the themes Steve Cartwright selects for his games, I have always loved submarine-based games. I still play this game regularly.

05 Megamania (ATARI 2600)

Another Steve Cartwright game and also one of the 2600's best shooters. Like *Seaquest*, I still play this game regularly to this day.

06 Call of Duty: WWII (PC)

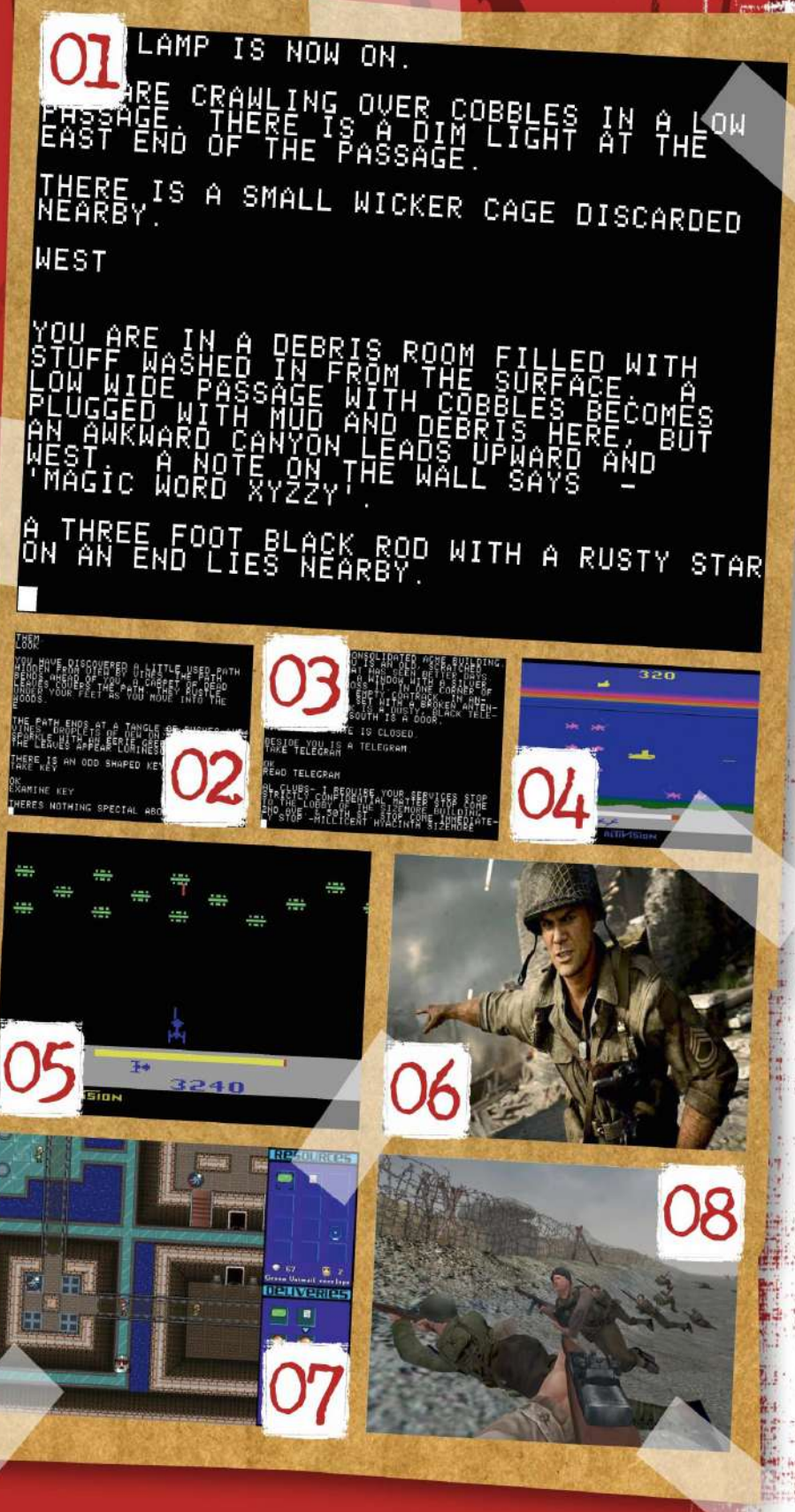
I've always been a student of history, particularly of World War II. I've spent a lot of time as a volunteer working around WWII bombers, such as the B-17 and B-24, and even doing WWII re-enactments at various memorials. I found *Call Of Duty: WWII* incredibly accurate and I have a blast playing it against other internet players.

07 Hyperspace Delivery Boy (PC)

I've always been a fan of John Romero's work. In 2002 I came across Monkeystone's *Hyperspace Delivery Boy* designed by John Romero and Tom Hall. The game is a wonderful old-school adventure. Soon after playing it, we contacted John and acquired the rights to port the game onto the Nintendo Game Boy Advance for Majesco Entertainment. However, the game was never released.

08 Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (PC)

Like *Call Of Duty: WWII*, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* is an incredibly accurate World War II title with beautiful graphics and fun gameplay.


01
LAMP IS NOW ON.
ARE CRAWLING OVER COBBLES IN A LOW PASSAGE. THERE IS A DIM LIGHT AT THE EAST END OF THE PASSAGE.
THERE IS A SMALL WICKER CAGE DISCARDED NEARBY.
WEST
YOU ARE IN A DEBRIS ROOM FILLED WITH STUFF WASHED IN FROM THE SURFACE. A LOW WIDE PASSAGE WITH COBBLES BECOMES PLUGGED WITH MUD AND DEBRIS HERE, BUT AN AWKWARD CANYON LEADS UPWARD AND WEST. A NOTE ON THE WALL SAYS -
'MAGIC WORD XYZZY'.
A THREE FOOT BLACK ROD WITH A RUSTY STAR ON AN END LIES NEARBY.
02
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TimeSplitters 2

IT'S GETTING OUT OF HAND

» GAMECUBE » 2002 » FREE RADICAL

Are you haunted by a specific moment in a game which you just couldn't beat, no matter how hard you tried? Of course you are, we all are. And if you're not, you're not human, you're a game-completing Terminator robot – sorry if that's come as a shock to you. My personal moment of shame is a weird one, and as you can tell from this screenshot, involves harrowing hand-people that evoke the same amount of terror as Mr Blobby did when I was a toddler.

Anyway, let's get to it. *TimeSplitters 2* has an ocean of game modes and characters locked behind certain challenges in the Arcade League mode. These matches give you scenarios to overcome, and they're pretty tongue-in-cheek and funny – like keeping away from a bunch of on-fire characters in the nightclub level: a literal disco inferno. I'd cut through these challenges like a hot knife through butter back in the day, and returning to the game almost two decades later, nothing has changed. In many ways, I've gotten better with age – Modern Drew has difficult nonsense like *Dark Souls* and the final bullet hell bit of *Nier: Automata* under his belt.

Then I get to 'Can't Handle This', a level where you play as Hatchet Sal against a horde of Handymen hungry for your blood. In the early Noughties, I found this level so hard it brought me to tears. But now I'm Modern Drew: I have a LISA, I do HIIT workouts in the morning, *I do the hoovering every other day* – surely I now have all the right faculties required to finally polish off this level?

The short answer is no, and my excuse is that I think it's literally impossible. There are about ten of the buggers, and they're all constantly chasing you. If by some miracle you pick up a good weapon, like the dual Tommy Guns, you'll still get turned into colander by ten Luger-wielding Handymen. And then one of them pries those super sweet bullet-hoses from your cold, dead corpse and it all becomes even more difficult.

I think this level was made by some Lovecraftian creature from beyond the pale to sow madness. Back in 2002, a level designer at Free Radical entered a fugue state as it possessed his brain. When the developer came to, this monstrosity of a level was sat in front of them, and they thought, 'Sweet! That'll work.'

For now, I concede defeat. Perhaps I'll give it another attempt in 20 years and write another ranty column for **Retro Gamer VR**, where my rage and disbelief gets beamed directly into your eyeballs.

>> This month we finally get our hands on the new Battletoads game, take the new Tony Hawk's Pro Skater remake for a spin (and kickflip) watch the first series of High Score and push pedal to the metal with Hotshot Racing. Phew!

✱PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARREN

Hotshot Racing

I really wasn't enjoying this at first, but once I got over my disappointment of the PC port I've found it to be a lot of fun.

DREW

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2

My friends might not be able to meet up IRL for a big Graffiti session, but we now have online thanks to this!

»[Xbox One] You can rack up some seriously impressive combos, even on your own – we've surpassed 100.

Battletoads

TOADALLY RADICAL

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** XBOX ONE
- **ALSO ON:** PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £14.99
- **PUBLISHER:** XBOX GAME STUDIOS
- **DEVELOPER:** DLALA STUDIOS/RARE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-3

If you're like us, you probably look back fondly at bizarre, absurd cartoons of the Nineties – the kind that would frequently sneak adult-level humour into family-friendly time slots, and frequently went beyond parody into self-parody. The good news is that this spirit lives on with the return of the quintessentially Nineties *Battletoads*. As we meet Pimple, Rash and Zitz in this game, we learn that they've all been living an externally induced delusion for the past 26 years. Nobody knows who they are any more, and all they want to do is become famous again.

The Saturday morning aesthetic can be seen everywhere in *Battletoads*. Just as every extreme, edgy character needed rock music in the Nineties, our handful of would-be heroes have it here.

»[Xbox One] Hopping on the turbo bikes might give you nightmare flashbacks, but these sections are actually reasonable.

»[Xbox One] Difficulty spikes depend on your skill in each genre – we love shooters, so we breezed through those stages.

Cartoon cutscenes contain some genuinely funny writing and some appealingly chunky character design, and that look continues into the game itself. The characters are great to watch as they stretch and morph, transforming into trains, circular saws, jackhammers and more. The enemies have received just as much love too, and it's great to see them looking absolutely crazy as they electrify the ground or charge across the stage.

Normally, the look of the game isn't the first thing we'd concentrate on, of course, but it's really that cartoon theme that ties everything together. From one-off minigames to recurring themes such as standard platforming, twin-stick shooter stages and even a 3D obstacle course that brings to mind the terrifying Turbo Tunnel of old, *Battletoads* is a game that never sticks to a single genre for too long. The game is constantly throwing new situations at you and

BRIEF HISTORY

» Developed by Rare and released for the NES in 1991, *Battletoads* was a hybrid platform beat-'em-up game that became infamous for its brutal difficulty. Despite that, it found favour with players because it was well-presented and, when it wasn't kicking you in the teeth, a lot of fun. A series of sequels followed, including *Battletoads In Battlemaniacs*, *Battletoads/Double Dragon* and even a 1994 arcade game distributed by Electronic Arts. The series has been dormant between then and now, save for cameo appearances in games like *Killer Instinct* and *Shovel Knight*, and a couple of inclusions on 2015's excellent *Rare Replay* compilation.

»[Xbox One] Pimple's platform stages combine action and puzzle-solving with a distinct indie game vibe.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

BATTLETOADS ARCADE

▼ SOMETHING NEW

STREETS OF RAGE 4

they're usually delightful, with each offering enough fresh material to sustain its screen time. Only a couple drag on too long, but we would like to have seen slightly better pacing – platform and shoot-'em-up stages are all pretty clumped together.

About a third of the stages are beat-'em-up levels, and these are the most mechanically rich as well as being the most common. The toads can mix up standard combos, launchers and power hits for some truly epic combos, as well as immobilising enemies with bubblegum or dragging them into combat range with their tongues. It's also possible to dodge and change planes, and there are plenty of mini-puzzles in these stages to ensure your brain doesn't rot away from simply smashing buttons all day.

You can play solo, in which case you'll be allowed to tag between toads during battles and essentially use your companions as extra lives during many sequences. However, *Battletoads* supports up to three players and the game is designed to take full advantage of that, dividing duties between players during some sequences to ensure that everyone stays engaged, while encouraging teamwork during beat-'em-up stages by allowing players to revive one another. You'll probably need to do that often, too, though thankfully the game is less tough than its infamous NES ancestor. We found that the standard Toad difficulty offered a decent challenge for veteran gamers, but Tadpole and Battletoad difficulties are there for those who prefer a different pace. Tadpole allows you to activate invincibility during sections where you're struggling, while Battletoad adds obstacles, toughens up enemies and removes checkpoints for a stiff challenge.

But while the developers have done a great job of ensuring that the difficulty levels are distinct from one another, the overall challenge feels like it varies quite a bit within each difficulty level. This is really an unavoidable consequence of offering so many different gaming styles in a single game – you're inevitably going to run into a genre that you're less brilliant at than the rest, and this will make the stage feel like a difficulty spike. The game clocked our first run on Toad difficulty at just over four hours, which is perfectly reasonable, but there's not a wealth of post-game content to explore. While you do have a total of 78 collectables to go back for and different difficulty levels to challenge, that's pretty much it.

»[Xbox One] It's always clear what you're supposed to do and what's dangerous in boss stages, which is appreciated.

You'll probably want to go back to have some multiplayer fun, but therein lies the other notable flaw that *Battletoads* has – there's no option to play online, which is a bizarre omission given how much thought has gone into co-op play. Don't get us wrong, we love that couch co-op has been prioritised as we believe that's how these games are best played, but it's a shame that those who don't have that option will lose out on such a key part of the experience.

Battletoads definitely came as a truly pleasant surprise to us. It's not often that a game can present us with a massage minigame that is truly unexpected, genuinely funny and completely contextually justified, and those are the kinds of surprises that the game will throw at you for as long as it lasts. It's not easy to take on a wide variety of genres and have them all feel well-constructed, but that's what has been achieved here. Let's hope we don't wait 26 years for the next game! ✱

»[Xbox One] Restoring functionality to this terrifying control panel will test your observational skills to the limit.

»[Xbox One] Posing after a triumphant day of battling and eating flies, Pimple really shows off his right angles.

In a nutshell

Genuinely funny and packed with variety, *Battletoads* is a very cartoon throwback that should amuse you greatly during its short runtime. If you have a local co-op team available, it'll be even better.

>> Score **83%**

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

High Score

» **Service:** Netflix » **Episodes:** 6

We're rather conflicted about Netflix's new videogame series. On the one hand, it offers some truly fantastic presentation with exceptional access to key developers, on the other it's an incredibly biased look at certain aspects of gaming, changing or ignoring key things in gaming history to tell its (admittedly informative) stories.

Granted, the show does have a tough task on its hand, as it's an impossible feat to tell the story of videogames across six episodes. So *High Score* focuses on bigger elements like the console war between Sega and Nintendo, the rise of 3D gaming, and the popularity of the NES and the success of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and this is where France Costrel's creation comes unstuck.

Even topics as focused as these feel broader than the 40-minute-plus episodes allow, so you have baffling omissions like deleting pioneer Ralph Baer from gaming's history, pretending *Dragon Quest* never existed and that *Final Fantasy* became a huge franchise without its earlier success, and a narrative that suggests 3D games didn't exist until *Doom* and *Star Fox* came along. The thing that is likely to rankle readers the most, though, is that the rise of gaming in Europe is barely mentioned.

Admittedly, *High Score*'s US and Japanese-based focus makes sense when you consider the target audience, but it still feels like a clumsy move. If *High Score* had simply chosen to focus on individual games like *The Toys That Made Us* it could have been something sensational. It's a pity, because in many ways, *High Score* really is excellent. While key Japanese figures like Hideo Kojima and Shigeru Miyamoto don't feature, the likes of Nintendo's Hirokazu Tanaka and *Street Fighter II*'s Akira Nishitani join a diverse cast of speakers to candidly talk about the subjects – the piece on cartridge creator Jerry Lawson is worth a watch alone – and it's even narrated by Charles 'It's a me, Mario' Martinet. There's a huge amount of rare footage too, which further enhances *High Score*'s narrative. It's just a pity it's a story we don't always recall growing up with.

»*High Score*'s presentation is glorious and is typically used to sum up key elements really quickly.

»Weirdly, *High Score* chooses to focus on Rebecca Heineman's *Space Invaders* high score and not the many games she created.

Hotshot Racing

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, Switch, Xbox One
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

Visually, *Hotshot Racing* is lovely, with low-polygon cars and environments that will make you crave the Nineties arcade racers of old. Mechanically however, *Hotshot* is mixed. The drifting is satisfying and there are a good range of multiplayer options, but a few key things do let things down somewhat. The AI is extremely aggressive, meaning one small slip can result in a loss. Then there's the disappointing track design with wide flat roads that would be rather dull to race around if it wasn't for those ferocious AI cars smacking your rear bumper. There's no denying *Hotshot Racing* is fun and polished but it doesn't quite take first place.

» Score **80%**

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2

» **System:** PS4 (tested), Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £39.99

Everyone loves a redemption story. After eating the pavement with *Pro Skater 5* in 2015, the Birdman has returned to form with this remake. Vicarious Visions is in the developer seat and much like its *Crash Bandicoot* remakes, it has created a faithful update to two of the most beloved titles in gaming history. Everything you could possibly wish for is here, and sliding back into the warehouse is like slipping on a comfortably battered pair of Vans, though the occasional glitch left us crumpled on the floor. Online can be spotty if you want to play with pals, but we're sure that'll get better with time.

» Score **86%**

CrossCode

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, Switch, Xbox One
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £14.99

This is an ambitious game that tries to blend puzzles with blasting and manages quite a good balance. While it has all the trappings of a traditional RPG with a slew of sidequests, hours of story and plenty of quirky characters, it's the combat where *CrossCode* really shines. Your avatar, Lea, has access to both melee and long-range attacks and all sorts of abilities which can enhanced through skill trees. Lea's ranged attacks are also used to solve many of the game's puzzles, like bouncing projectiles off walls to trigger switches. Some of the dungeons feel too long, but it's still worth investigating, and it looks delightful.

» Score **75%**

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE GREATEST GAMES PLAYSTATION HAS TO OFFER

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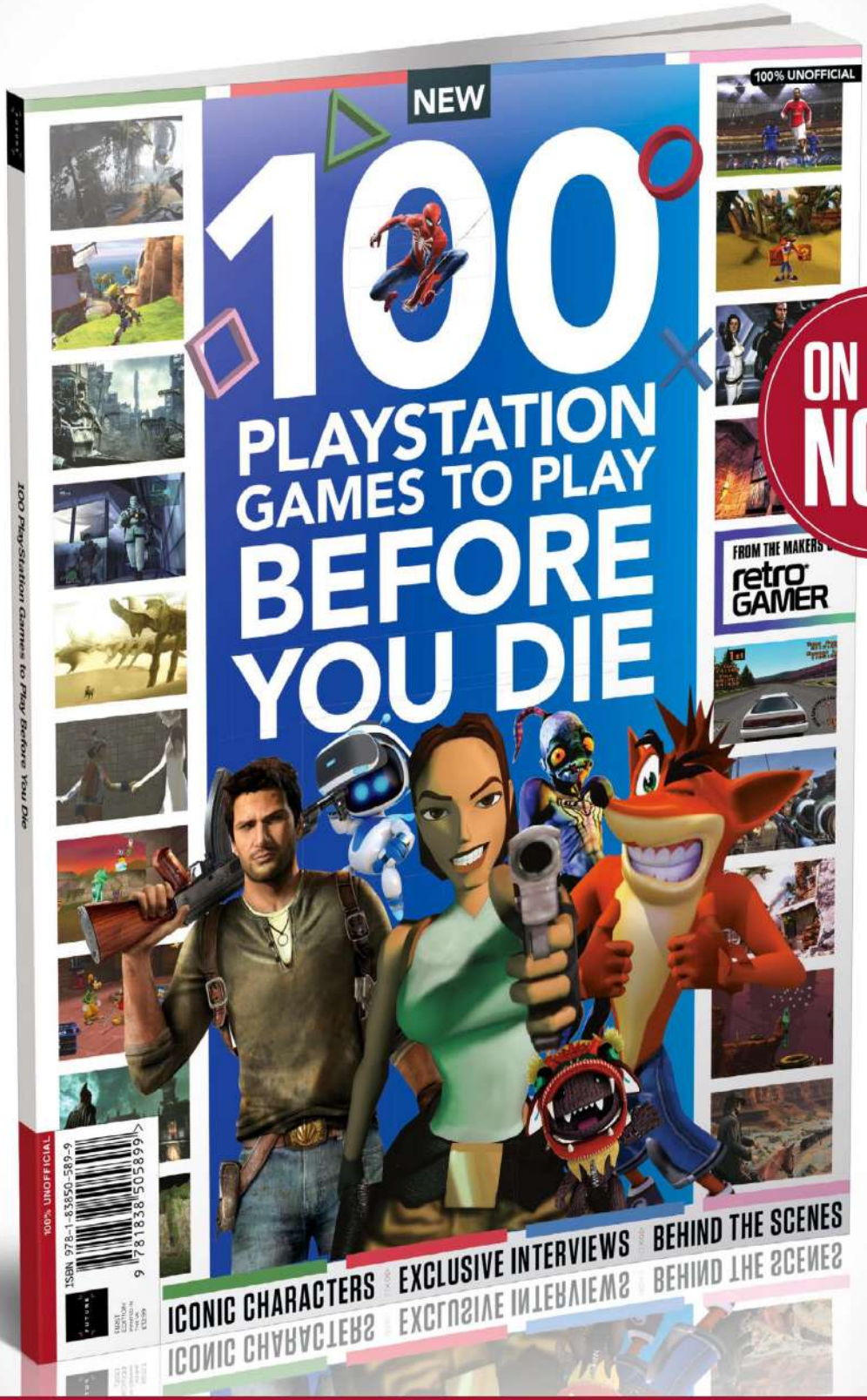

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COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SONIC PASTA CANS

"Food items are both oddities and very difficult to come across. As silly as they are, I'm very glad that I have them. I don't know if I enjoyed the taste at the time, but it's a nice little nostalgic memory from my childhood."

PAID: $30 FOR THE FIRST ONE, $10 FOR THE SECOND ONE

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

"There's nothing special about it, except that it's the first videogame I owned. The one thing that I'm not proud of is that I put one of the Nintendo cereal *Legend Of Zelda* stickers on the back and wrote my name on it, but I can't take it off."

PAID: GIFT

SEGA VISIONS COLLECTION

"I love paging through these, they're really great for when I plan articles or podcasts and I want to talk about what people were saying at the time. I wish I could scan them, but I know you kind of have to chop them up and I'm not prepared for that."

PAID: $350 OVER SEVERAL YEARS

BIO

NAME:
Barry Harmon

LOCATION:
Chicago, Illinois, USA

FAVOURITE GAMES:
Sonic The Hedgehog 2, Shenmue II, Jet Set Radio, Yakuza

FAVOURITE SYSTEMS:
Genesis, Dreamcast

WEBSITE:
www.segabits.com

SEGA SEAL OF QUALITY

"This was a Sega Forever award that was given out, I believe they only did one or two waves of it. As a kid, knowing that the Seal Of Quality was something they put on their packaging, and then to actually receive one from Sega themselves really meant a lot."

PAID: GIFT

JUST A FEW BITS

Barry Harmon's haul is a Sega treasure trove

It shouldn't take anyone long to work out where this month's collector's interests lie – with Ryo Hazuki, Ulala, Beat and Akira Yuki to all present, this is most definitely a Sega collection. Our collector, Barry, is one of the administrators of *SegaBits*, a site that covers everything related to the Japanese gaming giant.

"My dad was an early adopter of technology, and I think he felt like I should dive into that, so he asked me what I wanted for Christmas, if I wanted a videogame machine," explains Barry, telling us how he got started. "It really came down to me seeing the *Sonic* commercials and saying, 'I want whatever system plays *Sonic*.' When I got it for Christmas in 1991, it was the Genesis *Sonic* bundle. I think from then on I was confused, like, 'Wait, it doesn't play *Mario*?' I was young at the time!" Over time, Barry's interest in gaming remained strong, and the collection developed naturally. "After college, I moved into my own place and amassed all my videogames. When I assembled everything onto one shelf it was like, 'Oh, I have a collection going.' It seemed rather small, I had maybe a dozen Dreamcast games, a dozen Genesis games, a handful of Xbox and PS2 games, so I just always kept my eyes open for whatever interested me – I've never been a completionist."

By that point, Sega was no longer in the running as a hardware manufacturer, but Barry's interest remained strong. "I really enjoy how accessible and 'pick up and play' their games are, and I really like that they span a broad number of genres. You look at Capcom and you're pretty much looking at fighters, you're not going to say, 'Oh I love Capcom's racers,' it's much more pigeonholed, same with SNK. But when it comes to Sega, and I guess it was the nature of having a console that they had to tick all those boxes, I came in playing *Sonic* games but when I saw all the other stuff, everything looked so fun, colourful and accessible. And those arcade roots meant that a lot of stuff was quick bites, it's not like you were putting in 80 hours into every single Sega game. So a collection of a dozen Sega games, at the time it was everything that I needed."

That passion saw Barry writing for a number of Sega blogs before joining the website *SegaBits* in 2010, where he is now an administrator alongside the site's founder George Gidim. "Highlights are attending events like the *Sonic* 25th anniversary party in San Diego, and the interviews – getting to interview the likes of Tom Kalinske, and voice actors like Roger Craig Smith," he tells us. "Honestly, my favourite ones are when I'll talk to people and they'll say, 'You know, no one's talked to me about this game since it released.' Just the ability to talk to people and really pick their brains about things, and kind of contribute to unearthing videogame history."

Despite owning everything from the *Shinobi* LCD game to a Sonic toaster, there are still items Barry is keen to hunt down, though they relate to a tough target. "I would love to get that Segata Sanshiro doll that they had. It almost looks like a joke to me, I don't believe it's real, but that's one that I'd like." "I'm really into the oddities, so to have any Segata stuff – I only have a handful, my Segata collection is lacking." Of course, that might just be the lingering fear of a nasty judo throw talking!

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SONIC 25TH ANNIVERSARY STATUE

"I was gifted this by Francesca Reyes, who was the editor in chief of *Official Xbox Magazine*, but also worked on the *Official Dreamcast Magazine*. I interviewed her for our 50th episode [of *Swingin' Report Show*], and when the Xbox magazine folded and she was cleaning out her office, she thought of me and messaged me asking, 'Hey, would you like this statue?' It means more to me that it's from her than the fact that it's a very hard-to-find collectable."

PAID: GIFT

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Original big box copies of LucasArts' adventure game will set you back a pretty penny these days. The Amiga release ranges from **£50 to £165**, the Atari ST version from **£35 to £100**, and the 3.5-inch disk PC version from **£75 to £110**. 5.25-inch disk PC versions fetch even higher prices, from **£150 to £275**, with the 16-colour version tending to sell for more than the 256-colour version. Of course, cheaper re-releases are available on all of those formats, and the CD versions are arguably far more convenient too.

BATTLETOADS

If the modern incarnation of Rare's triad of troublesome toads has got you hankering for some old-school punishment, a full boxed PAL copy of the original NES game will run you **£50 to £90**, with the usual Nintendo caveat that loose carts are far cheaper. NTSC copies run from **£45 to £150**, and are faster than the PAL version, as you'd expect.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Xbox game prices are still incredibly low, which makes this classic action adventure game very cheap and easy to pick up. It goes for as little as **99p** in both its Classics and original release forms, with a high price of **£8**, but if you're feeling particularly extravagant you could pick up a 'brand-new' copy for the low price of **£12**.

MUSHA ALESTE

This Mega Drive shooter is a heavy hitter, as you can tell by the price. The Japanese version will go for **£150 to £230**, which already seems pretty high, but the US version (simply titled *MUSHA*) is something else. You'll need **£465 to £580** to snag that, with even a nonworking complete copy hitting **£232** and a working loose cart reaching **£245**.

SPY HUNTER

If reading Darran's Retro Revival on the Spectrum version of this arcade classic has put you in the mood to play it, the good news is you won't have to pay much for the privilege. The game sells for **£2.50 to £9.00** in its original US Gold clamshell form. It appears on compilations and budget labels too, so it's easy to find.

HOW MUCH?!

SONIC MASTER SYSTEM BUNDLE

If you've ever collected Master System games, you'll know that Sonic's platform adventures are all common, cheap games. So we're mystified as to why someone would pay **£132.85** for *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Sonic Chaos* – especially given that the spine on *Sonic Chaos* was sun faded. If you want to splash some cash on Sonic games for Sega's 8-bit console, try the far rarer *Sonic Spinball* or *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*.

Prices correct at time of print

MAILBAG

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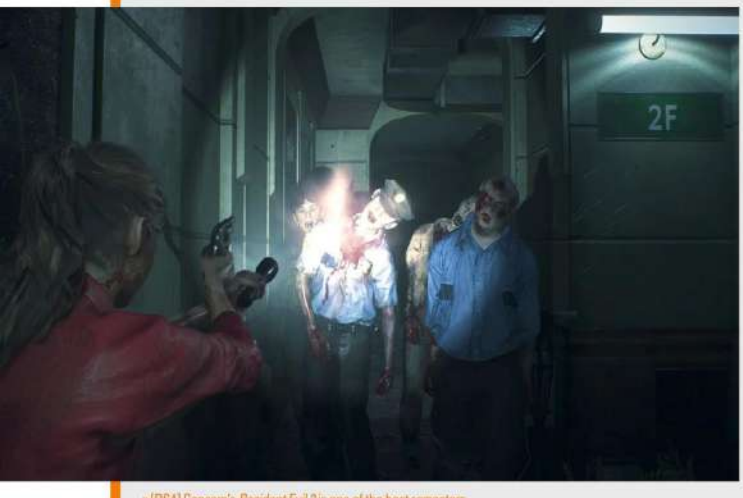
STAR LETTER

THE ART OF THE REMASTER

Dear **Retro Gamer**
I've been playing the new remaster of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2* and it's absolutely incredible. I loved the original games growing up and I've been eagerly awaiting its release since it was announced and I've not been disappointed at all. Conversely, I've just seen the new *Mario* collection that's been announced by Nintendo, and to be honest I'm a little disappointed as its far more expensive and appears to have had very little work done to it in comparison to *Tony Hawk*. Still, this leads me to my main point and it's this: what does the team think about remasters, and which ones do you feel are best? Recent offerings that have impressed me include the *Crash Bandicoot N Sane Trilogy*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* and *Resident Evil 2*, but I'm sure there are many others. I'd love to see a look behind the scenes at why these games are made and how you balance keeping new gamers and old fans happy. I'd also been keen to know what you look for in a good remaster as well.
Regards,
Brett Sherwood

You've certainly got great taste in games, Brett. Darran recently christened his new PC with a playthrough of *Resident Evil 2* and the entire team (except for Andy) have been enjoying the new *Tony Hawk's* game (you can read our thoughts on page 90). We cover a lot of remakes, compilations and remasters in the mag, and one of the most important questions we ask when reviewing these games are typically: 'What is this offering over the original version our readers probably already own.' Remasters have been around for many years now, so maybe it's something we can look at exploring for a latter issue.



» [PS4] Capcom's *Resident Evil 2* is one of the best remasters we've recently played and builds on the original classic.

PUCKING EXCELLENT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm a subscriber to your excellent magazine, congratulations for your incredible work. Here, in the province of Quebec, Canada, finding your magazine in stands is rare, so a subscription is the best way to be sure not to miss out on any action going on in **RG**.

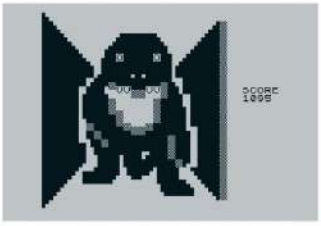
Being Canadian, I am, of course, a big hockey fan and I was wondering if you have ever written an article about the history of hockey videogames? If not, would this be a possibility for a later issue? Please keep the good work going!
Thank you and best regards,
Yannick Labbé

We're glad you're enjoying the magazine, Yannick. Sadly, ice hockey isn't quite as popular in the UK as it is in Canada, so we've not really covered the sport much. If we get enough requests we'll certainly reconsider, though.

A-MAZE-ING

Hi Mr Editor,
My name is Stephen. I am a new subscriber to **Retro Gamer**. I've been reading for years, but, now more than ever, I thought a subscription would be a good idea, as I try to make only essential journeys at a time of a global health emergency.

3D Monster Maze, eh? Never heard of it, but I was glad to read about it. How eerie and disconcerting. Plus, *Corridors Of Genon* will give me sleepless nights just reading about it. How creatures like the Boguls can be so scary, I do not know. Maybe that is like life, a bit like how innocuous-looking creatures like hippos and giraffes can be aggressive and dangerous.



» [ZX81] It speaks to Malcolm Evans' talent that gamers still find *3D Monster Maze* spooky today.

» [SNES] Is anyone else keen on reading a feature about ice hockey games? Let us know at the usual address.

To be honest, the issue really took me back to my childhood in the Eighties. I played *Sultan's Maze* on the Amstrad, another creepy maze-related game. Computer game publishers in the Eighties and beyond certainly knew how to make mazes have an evil presence. *Sultan's Maze* definitely was atmospheric, and I definitely wanted to get out of the maze ASAP. I wonder, will you ever cover *Sultan's Maze*? It'd be great to learn more about it.

Thanks again for a great issue, having the magazine delivered to my door will be something enjoyable.
Kind regards,
Stephen Parry

We're so glad you are enjoying your subscription, Stephen, and we're glad you enjoyed reading about *3D Monster Maze*, even if you weren't familiar with it. We're well aware of *Sultan's Maze* as Darran used to own it on his CPC 464. We'll see if we can rustle up a suitable article.

POKE MY MEMORY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Does anyone on your team remember a computer game fanzine called *What Poke*?

I was a big fan of my Spectrum in the Eighties and I used to make the arduous trip to my local games shop in Tooting and it would sell this forgotten publication. It was a booklet full of articles and reviews, but mostly it had numerous cheat modes and POKEs for gamers to tap in and use. I've searched the internet and can't find any sort of link or acknowledgement of it whatsoever!

Can someone please put my mind at ease and tell me they remember

CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

it too, and it wasn't just a figment of my imagination!

Kind regards and great mag!

Greg Brock

To be honest, Greg, we don't remember this fanzine at all, but you're in luck because Twitter's Spectrum Adventurer (@ZXadventurer) does. They revealed that *What Poke* was by a computer shop called H&D Services and was distributed to independent UK computer shops and advertised in the small ads of the time. They also revealed that as well as Spectrum gamers, *What Poke* also catered for C16 and Plus 4 owners, too. Many thanks for helping us out, Spectrum Adventurer!

KEEP ON TRUCKING

Hiya!

I just wanted to introduce myself. I go by Emily, I am 38 and have been gaming since the golden age of Atari. I frequently browse the latest **Retro Gamer** issue with my Apple News+ subscription, where I am also reading the magazine's archives from the last few years. After reading 'We Are Legion' from **Retro Gamer 179** (March 2018) I couldn't agree more with Paul's views. As a nationwide truck driver, I rarely encounter another retro gamer to talk with or play with, but **Retro Gamer**, playing classic games on my phone and the incredible YouTube retro gaming channel communities certainly keep the retro spirit alive! I can also partly thank gaming for helping me develop the reflexes, organisation and time management skills needed to be a success on the road. Many thanks.

Emily Apricot

We're glad you enjoy the magazine and it's great Paul's column connected with you, Emily. While communities always have their bad apples, they can also be a great source of information and enjoyment. We're glad you're helping to keep the spirit of retro alive like the rest of us.

» It's great to see channels like Metal Jesus Rocks keeping the spirit of retro alive.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Darran's New PC

If you've learned anything about Darran from reading the magazine for the last 15 years, it's that he gets mildly obsessive over something and quickly loses interest in it shortly afterwards. His latest joy of joys is his brand-new computer that would have been even more futureproof than it currently is if he had just waited a few short months. Still, he's happy with it and it's been a nice distraction for the rest of the team as it's meant he hasn't been banging on about PlayStation and N64 games.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What your favourite thing about The Secret Of Monkey Island?

» [PC] Kai Lunk has fond memories of Elaine and Guybrush's relationship.

@Liquidream
For me, it's the *feel*. I first played it around my mate's house and it looked so gorgeous that, for a moment… you could suspend belief, take in the sights and sounds and feel like you're actually a wannabe pirate, deep in the Caribbean…

Jackie Fate
I thought originally that I needed to blast the ship with the rock so my crew would come to the island and help me. Instead, you need to hit the banana tree, of course, which is all kinds of stupid!

Chris Bartliff
The whole atmosphere of Mêlée Island and the fact that I was free to explore it blew me away when I was a kid.

@TooOldTooCold
Playing it at a friend's house with a couple of friends over the summer holidays. Pre-internet, so no guides. It took hours of hard work.

Kai Lunk
When Guybrush meets Elaine on the bridge at the harbour. Being 13 years old, I had a really emotional reaction to that romantic scene that I'd never forget.

Ric Novoa
Walking into the SCUMM Bar. That music instantly takes me back to my youth.

@syncoplay
I met a girl at work who grew up playing *Monkey Island*, and so had I. Our first date was a night where we stayed up until 3:00 am and marathoned the entire game. Seven years and two kids later and we're still total nerds.

@Berty_D
The fact that it felt open world in a way (it obviously wasn't) and the joy of finding a new part of the island. Plus, the parrot scene with the Meathook character always makes me laugh.

@Solyant1
The music. When I hear the *Monkey Island* song I'm instantly in a good mood.

Alan Grapes
When he lands upside down from being shot from the cannon and the text is upside down – a genuine 'LOL' moment for me.

@kadoomed
The humour, definitely the humour. I still laugh at the red herring puzzle, even though it foxes me every time.

Tom Clark
Drowning Guybrush by leaving him underwater for ten minutes. Not only did it provide payoff for what seemed like a throwaway gag earlier in the game, but the way the options changed to things like 'bloat' showed a tar-dark sense of humour and a great attention to detail.

@retrotap
The sword fighting. I remember learning the different retorts and finding them hilarious.

retro GAMER

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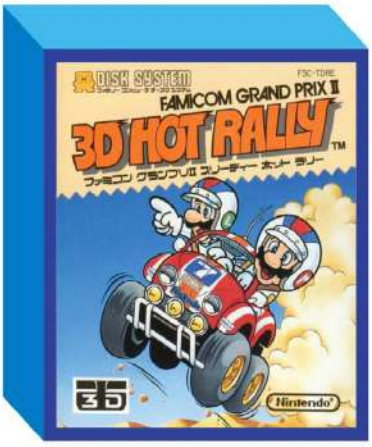


FAMICOM GRAND PRIX II: 3D HOT RALLY

» Hey look, it's Mario and Luigi on the front cover! This isn't recognised as an 'official' Mario spin-off game, like Mario Kart, but then again it didn't get released outside of Japan so it's hardly recognised to begin with. So what can we do but shine a light on this somewhat obscure racer? Why, the same thing we do every month, Pinky – we can spoil the ending for you.

01

» The race is over, and our favourite family plumbing business might well be finished. After all, the riches gained from winning this rally must surely be enough to set Mario and Luigi up for life, right? You'd like to think so.

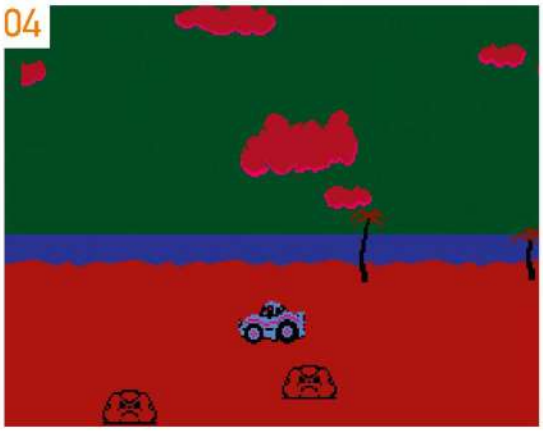
02

» So the pair drive home, discussing what they'll do with their newly earned riches. Mario considers buying a security system for a female friend with a highly unfortunate stalker problem, while Luigi just wants to own a massive house.

03

» But will either of the brothers get what they truly desire? Do they even know what they want? They've saved royalty, they're accomplished racing drivers and they even throw a pretty good board game party. They've done it all.

04



» The truth is, it's lonely at the top. For these two, fame and fortune have become a necessity. They stopped having to prove anything long ago – they just keep themselves in the spotlight because they're afraid of being forgotten. The plumbing business? That's the only thing that keeps them grounded.

05

» It's been hours, and the sun has set, but Mario and Luigi are still driving along that beach. Going home can wait – these two are deciding on their next destination. And when you're going nowhere with an infinite amount of time to get there, no detour is too far out of the way.

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